Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

Year: 1974	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
January 6, 1974	"– About The Gift's"	Matthew 2:11
January 13, 1974	"Saint Luke: A Colony of Heaven"	Philippians 3:20
January 20, 1974	Meditation	
February 3, 1974	"Remaining Resources"	Revelation 3:2
February 3, 1974	Meditation	
February 10, 1974	"Turnabout"	
February 17, 1974	"Of A Fault And A Forgiveness"	Philemon 15
February 24, 1974	"On Being Quietly Confident"	Isaiah 30:15
March 3, 1974	"A Man Named Peter"	
March 10, 1974	"A Man Named Andrew"	John 1:42
March 17, 1974	"A Man Named John"	John 19:26
March 24, 1974	"A Man Named Matthew"	
March 31, 1974	"A Man Named Judas"	John 18
MISSING April 12, 1974	Meditation Of The Seven Words From The Cross	
April 14, 1974		
April 28, 1974	"To Be Used By God"	II Timothy 2:21
May 5, 1974	"The Set of The Soul"	Acts 1:25
May 19, 1974	"On Getting To Know God"	Job 22:21
MISSING May 26, 1974	"A Sermon For Memorial Day Sunday"	Deut. 30:19-20
June 2, 1974	Meditation	

1974- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
June 9, 1974	"1974 Saint Luke Baccalaureate"	
June 9, 1974	"In The Light OF Common Day"	
June 16, 1974	"The End Of All—"	
June 16, 1974		
June 23, 1974	"To Flee From Fear"	I John 4:18
June 30, 1974	"America-And God's Mercy"	
July 9, 1974		Mark 4:35-41
MISSING July 14, 1974	"How The Story Ended"	Luke 15:20
MISSING July 28, 1974	"The Risk-Taker"	
MISSING August 4, 1974	"I Am The Way---"	
MISSING August 11, 1974	"To Learn To Pray--"	
MISSING August 18, 1974	"Why Are You So Fearful--?"	Mark 4:40
MISSING August 25, 1974	God's Glory In The Morning"	
MISSING September 1, 1974	"To Work To God's Glory"	
MISSING September 29, 1974	"And Always The Enemy"	
MISSING October 13, 1974	"Praise Ye The Lord" or "Something To Sing About"	
MISSING October 20, 1974	"Another Harvest—"	
MISSING October 27, 1974	"What have You Been Doing Lately?"	
MISSING November 10, 1974	"Saints—Beware!"	
MISSING November 17, 1974	"Where Two Or Three—"	Matthew18:20

1974- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
MISSING November 24, 1974	"The Possibility Which Is Paradise"	
December 1, 1974		John 1:18
December 8, 1974	"The Day That's Before Us"	Romans 13:12-13
MISSING December 15, 1974	"Push And Pull"	
MISSING December 22, 1974	"A Gift For All Seasons"	
MISSING December 24, 1974	To Care Enough"	John 3:16

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Epiphany of Our Lord — January 6, 1974

" - - - ABOUT THE GIFTS"

THE TWELFTH Day, O God, is upon us. The season passes quickly. Perhaps today once more for a little while we can capture anew the meaning of what did happen when Your Son came to us personally. Amen.

If it's a text that you'll be wanting, let me announce it now. It comes from the Gospel that was read for this Sunday which marks the Epiphany of our Blessed Lord, the second chapter of Matthew, the eleventh verse. The reference is to the travelers who came a great distance to pay homage to Jesus Christ. Frequently they are referred to as Wise Men, or as Magi, or the Three Kings:

> "Then they opened their treasures and presented unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Babies don't ask questions. Children do. And the child that remains in the heart of every man never quite has done with the asking of questions. It may be a bit of embarassment, of course it is, when someone comes to visit in a home, and particularly if that person who comes to visit is somebody who has been away on a journey - - and while that person was away on a journey the youngster in the home has heard the parents speak of where he had gone, the places he had visited, the things that he might have seen . . . and then maybe the youngster himself had gone with his parents to greet that person upon his return, and they couldn't help but notice how heavily-laden he was at the airport, or at the bus terminal -- the suitcases filled with not only his clothing but hopefully souvenirs that he had brought back with him. So when the person comes to visit . . . . . babies don't ask questions -- children do -- and in-

variably, much to the embarrassment of the parent -- "What did you bring me?"

The child that remains in the heart of every man, well it was characterized all over again when you looked at those packages under the Christmas tree twelve days ago. You and I waited our turn, wondering what it is that might bear our name, eagerly unwrapping the package . . . what is it? what did you bring me? And then sometimes the question is also asked, once we discover that it is ours, "What shall I do with it?" -- particularly if it's something that is new, strange and unfamiliar to us. Babies don't ask questions - - children do . . . "What did you bring me?" - - "What shall I do with it?"

It's not too much to suggest that you might use your sanctified imagination now and try to picture as best you can Mary, the mother of our Blessed Lord, nestling not the Baby Jesus but the Child Jesus in her lap, holding Him in her arms. Now no longer a baby but a child, Jesus says, "Mommy, tell it to me again!" - - - of course she was the one who related the story of those strange happenings on that strange night! How else would He have known? Who was in a better position to tell Him than Mary, His mother? And so as before, like as not, she told Him about shepherds who heard angels sing, how they came to the place where He was born. . . . .

. . . and then the wonderment crept into His eyes when she said, "And after a while there were people who came who had traveled a great distance! - - I really don't know how far they traveled, but they came from far, far away. When they came, they knelt down in front of you and me. They didn't say anything. They didn't ask any questions! They simply knelt -- offered a prayer. And then they opened their treasures and they brought you some gifts - - "

...the dark-eyed, olive-skinned boy with wonderment in His eyes looked up into the eyes of His mother and says -- yes He did! -

-- permit yourself to believe it! - - -

"Mommy, what did they bring me?".....and she said, "They brought you gold, frankincense and myrrh."

....As He grew older, He might have asked her also, "Mommy, what did you do with those gifts that they brought me?"

Some years back I got a very uncomfortable feeling when a friend came to visit us in our little place in the hills of home. No sooner had she crossed the threshold than her eyes went from wall to wall and corner to corner in the room. I was uncomfortable at first because I felt she was ill, she came in such a dazed manner, so it seemed. Then it occurred to me. She was an artist, and she had painted a scene especially for us and had it framed. And months before she had given it to us. Now, you see what was happening -- she was paying the visit by special design, wondering what we had done with it - - hoping, of course, to see it adorning the wall some place in a prominent position . . .

..."Mommy," says the Child Jesus to Mary, His mother - -

"what did you do with those gifts they brought me?"

Why don't you speculate. Gold, the precious coin. What couldn't she have done with that for Him, what couldn't He have done with it, poor peasant girl that she was? - - precious gold in front of her . . .

- - she could have used it to buy Him one brand new outfit after another ..... maybe . . .

- - she could have put it aside, and then used it to pay the tuition in the School of the Rabbis, where this child might learn precious religious truth.....maybe that's what she did with this precious gold coin . . . .

- - maybe, who knows, she put it aside, to say, "One day, as my son grows up, he should go to Jerusalem all by himself. There's much to see, there's much to do, and I'll set the coin aside for his use against that day . . . "

"Mommy, what did you do with the gold?" Who knows! Maybe she kept it until the day when He could have His own donkey and His own donkey-cart . . .

...wait now, one more suggestion if you don't mind -- maybe she kept it for Him so that one day, apprentice to Joseph, the master-carpenter, with that gold coin He could buy His own set of tools, and His own tool box! Who knows!

...."What did you do with it?" Gold was meant to be used. How do you suppose it was spent?

"What did they bring me?" . . . she also said, "Frankincense - - " And how was frankincense used? They tell us that it was used by the priest, in the rituals - - - "Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as the evening sacrifice" . . . . and then in ancient Jewish ritual the incense would be burned. And as it ascended heavenward the prayers of the faithful were meant to ascent toward the Throne of Grace . . . .

"What did you do with it, Mommy?" Well maybe Mary said, "The very first time that you went to the temple I carried it along with me, and I said to the priest, 'Use it -- especially today -- let the prayers of the faithful ascend in behalf of this child whom God has given to me' . . . "

- - maybe she kept it against that day when He was driven from the synagogue, and then in no uncertain way the sword that pierced her heart, Mary was given to understand that this child-of-hers-now-become-man would be dealt with cruelly because it was a

wicked world He had to face. Maybe on that day she was driven to the temple and she said to the priest, "Please, today is the day you use this frankincense -- today he needs to be surrounded by the arms of prayer as never before!" - - - who knows!

"Mommy, what did they bring me?"

"Gold," she said.

"Frankincense," she said.

"Myrrh."

"Mommy, what is myrrh?"

Well, I had to refresh my own memory. So last night or early this morning I checked out my dictionary . . . it's resin from the forest, that's what it is. And in the Middle East and in East Africa there's a particular tree, of the balsam species, its bark and its wood is odiferous, and you can draw the resin from this type of tree. It's really a drug. As an ingredient it was part of the anointing oils that were used to anoint the dead and to embalm the bodies of the dead. I have no trouble speculating with what was done with the gold that was brought to Jesus.....I have no trouble speculating with what was done with the frankincense that was brought to Him. But I'm about to suggest to you that nothing much was ever done with myrrh. It was a drug.

Scripture reminds us how Jesus Christ refused, in the time of His anguish, hanging upon the cross, when myrrh was offered to Him -- you can read it for yourself - - - He would not allow the pain to be taken away from His anguish because He came to identify Himself fully with us. Men cannot take pain away. Men find ways by which to relieve themselves of the pain. But not so Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came into the world to be sensitive to our need, not insensitive. Jesus Christ made the divine invasion, He came to us, to be with us, to taste

all of life with us to the full, to experience reality - - - not to escape from it, not to retreat, not to withdraw. And so I must say to you, as I understand it, it could well be that the gift of myrrh was never used.

In an age such as ours that relies so heavily upon the use of drugs in order to escape reality, in order to have the burden of life taken away, if only for a little while, we do well to remember the example of Jesus Christ. We happen to live in a world that is very real. We happen to live in a world that can be very painful. We also happen to live in a world where there's always going to be a tomorrow morning, and the day after! And if I understand the mind and the mood of Jesus Christ aright, He did not set before us an example that says: withdraw! - - retreat! - - escape from reality in whatever way that you can!

Yesterday in the quiet corner of this place that's known as the Chapel of the Grateful Heart, I sat with one of our parishioners, for a little while, who had a burden -- the burden of being misunderstood. There are younger folk of her acquaintance who scoff at her for coming back to this place Sunday after Sunday. She has made known to them that here within these sacred walls she receives a measure of peace, the burden of the responsibilities of the week is eased. And when she is stained by sin she receives here the assurance that God loves her and her sins are forgiven.....

....her younger friends can be very cruel. They say to her, quoting another, "Religion for you is just an opiate -- it's a drug - - it allows you just for one hour to enter an unreal world!"

..."What can I say to them, Pastor? I can't live without this hour in the week that I spend within the shadow of the altar of Saint Luke!" - - that was her sentiment - - "They're all wrong!" - - - that was the gist of her converse-

tion - - "If it weren't for what I receive here I couldn't face the real world! I'm made strong - - " (it wasn't her exact verbiage, but I'll say it for her)

" - - I'm empowered by the Holy Spirit through that hour and I can go back and face the burdens, and the pain, and the wickedness."

I have little patience with people who allow themselves to believe that religion is an opiate. According to the mind and the manner and the mood of Jesus Christ, He faced life head-on. That's why He came, you see -- to be our guide, to be the Way, to be our Saviour.

"Mommy, what did they bring me?"

"Gold. Frankincense. And myrrh."

"What did you do with them, Mommy?"

....I think she had an answer for the gold.

....I think she had an answer for the frankincense.

....but by the time He died He didn't need an answer for the myrrh. And that's why I can say to you now:

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
First Sunday After The Epiphany - Anniversary Sunday - January 13, 1974

"SAINT LUKE: A COLONY OF HEAVEN"

Text: "We are a colony of Heaven . . "
(Philippians 3:20)

O GOD, on this day accept our gratitude
for every servant of the Word who stood
at a sacred desk and proclaimed to Your
people in this Congregation Your Gospel.
Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord.
Amen.

First, the text. Tuck it away in your mind. We will be coming back to it a bit later. It's the 20th verse of the 3rd chapter of the Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christians who lived in Philippi. I'll give you Moffet's translation if you don't mind -- it's a very good one: "You are a colony of Heaven."

Now keep that text in the back of your mind.

Now let me tell you, if you don't mind, that when we broke up the home in which my father and mother had lived, after they had finished their earthly pilgrimage, the six of us considered ourselves fortunate if we could take with us this item or that item. For naturally every child is a sentimentalist of sorts, no matter what his age may be. And each one of us might prize one thing in particular that would hold us in good stead as we looked back and remembered the impressionable years that we had spent under the gracious influence of our parents. There is one thing that I am sorry that I never got, and for this moment I don't know where it went. It was my father's needle. Now that deserves an explanation, of course it does.

My father, as some of you know, came from the old country, and when he came to these shores he earned an honest day's livlihood by being a peddler.

He would walk from village to village with a suitcase in either hand, supported by a leather strap over his shoulders. Those suitcases contained handkerchiefs and shoe laces and notions. By the time he died he had progressed to the place where he was selling perfectly beautiful antique Oriental rugs.

Now occasionally one of his customers would ask him to repair a rug, and I can see my father seated on the floor, tailor-fashion, with the rug creeping around all sides, and there with a needle in his hand -- a needle longer than his longest finger, made of good steel, and he would use that to repair or to restore the rug.

Now when I look back and remember how he did that, I also think of another man who had a needle in his hand, who lived in the same part of the world from which my dad came. That man happened to have been the Apostle Paul, and he gained an honest day's livlihood going around from place to place, even though he was a preacher, by mending tents. And as I come to this sacred desk this morning I am thinking of how he might have been seated on the floor, or the ground, mending a tent.....and he may have said "Ouch!" as the needle pricked his finger or his thumb, because he wasn't keeping his eye completely on his business.

He had one eye on what was happening across the street. For in all likelihood across the street was the Roman garrison in Philippi, and a new contingent of Roman colonists had come to Philippi. And as the tent-mender with his needle in hand was repairing that tent, he was reflecting on what was happening.

Now - - put a pin in that for the moment. I've got to refresh your mind historically. And what I am about to tell you at this point may seem almost incredible to you. But there was a time when the Roman Empire stretched

all the way from the North Sea to the Sahara, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Euphrates River. Augustus, the first Emperor, realized that he had a problem on his hand. It wasn't simply enough to conquer these people, and to bring them within the realm, but once they were conquered they had to be held together by the marvelous force of what was the spirit and the mind of the Roman people. He knew that. So what did he do? Very cleverly, he would choose certain people -- very deliberately -- and then he'd assign them to certain outposts or certain places where they would go and live for a certain period of time. For his empire, you see, embraced a variety of cultures and traditions and legends and languages. Now, how to bring them into the spirit of Rome? -- and how to have Rome's spirit permeate into their lives? Very simple procedure: -- he simply, deliberately, chose certain people and then he put them down here and he put them down there and he said, "Here is where you live. And when you live there, you must never forget, you live as a Roman citizen" . . . he had his little colonies spread throughout the empire.

Now, let's get back to the tent-mender and his needle.

As Paul is busy repairing that tent, with his eye on the new people from Rome coming to be established in that garrison, recognizing that they are colonists from Rome, he reflected upon the Christian community, and he says to the Christians: "You are a colony of Heavey -- especially chosen by Christ to be His representatives, to live according to His life-style, that it might permeate the community round about you."

Now as I come to this sacred desk on this Anniversary Sunday I have been hard-pressed to find some new thing to tell you, because for the most part I have been coming here now on eighteen different Anniversary Sundays, to share with you the Gospel message for this particular day. And I am grateful that this is the text that does not allow my mind to pass from it -- it continues

to claim me. Moffet's way of translating the 20th verse of the 3rd chapter of what Paul had to write to those Christians who lived in Philippi: "You are a colony of Heaven." . . . and this I say to you with all the strength that I can command is what Saint Luke Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, in the mind of God is meant to be: A Colony of Heaven.

I hope you won't mind when I tell you that it was rather a traumatic experience for me when I came down from the hills of home to be your Pastor. Surely you know by this time that I grew up in a small town, I married a country girl, my first parish was in a community that numbered forty thousand people....and then at 40 years of age to be exposed to metropolitan living, to become the Pastor of a parish in suburbia. Not long after I was here I was asked to prepare a paper on "The Mission of the Church in Suburbia" - - and in the preparation of that paper it occurred to me -- oh, perhaps you won't like me to tell you -- that the church in suburbia is surrounded by pagan influences...we have what sometimes can be referred to as a "paganized culture." I suppose I could document that for you, if you of all people needed to have it documented....

> ...and eventually looked upon myself coming here with the same degree of Christian vocation and commitment as a missionary goes to the Far East, to Africa and to India.....surrounded as we are by paganized influences.

Which allows me to think now as never before, that this is an apt descriptive for Saint Luke Lutheran Church, and any other Christian community in this area - - - we are colonies, established by God, colonies of Heaven, meant to introduce into our culture the Christian life-style just as those Roman colonists were meant to introduce Rome's life-style in the society of which they were part.

Now let me share with you several characteristics of the Christian Church

which can be seen as a colony of Heaven -- --

One, the people who live within the colony of Heaven are chosen, just as the Emperor chose those colonists to go out.....

You ought to allow yourself to believe this quite earnestly. Any single person who is a member of the Christian Church is one who has been called. Martin Luther is absolutely right when he looks upon one of the works of the Holy Spirit: to gather people together, to enlighten them, and to bring them -- the word from which we get 'church' is 'ecclesia' which means "called out" -- chosen -- selected.

It comes to some people as quite a surprise, in the New Members Group, when they meet for the first time, to have me tell them that they ought to recognize this truth: that they happen to be in that room where the New Members Group is meeting because they're responding to God's call. It wasn't just the invitation from the secretary of the Committee on Membership, or the Chairman of the Committee on Membership, or the fact that you, God bless your soul! -- did take time to bring them or to call them on the phone and encourage them to come -- -- these are but the instruments that God uses. But basically, when we come together in God's name, we come together because we are responding to God's call.

And every time you come to a worship service -- why not call it by its rightful name! -- you're responding to God's claim, you're responding to God's call to you. And by the same token, every time you stay away, and every time you allow yourself to be on the periphery, you're ignoring God's call to you. For the Church, properly understood, is made up of those whom God calls, whom God elects, whom God chooses. We are the chosen ones. Allow yourself the tonic of a wholesome pride in seeing yourself as one who has been called and selected. That's what the colony is, this colony of Saint Luke Church and every other Christian group.

And the second characteristic/that of colony is that you are being nurtured

and sustained. Every time you come together within this colony, whether you recognize it or not, you are being sustained and nurtured, you are being sgrengthened, not only by what you receive when the Word is proclaimed and when the Sacraments are offered, but also the inspiration that you get from others who come together. And all of this is simply to say that when this happens it happens because we are allowing the Eternal Dimension to prevail. Every time we come together, together we are in contact with home base, which, if you please, is Heaven itself.

Whenever we have been able to travel abroad, and I remember particularly that trip around the world, and we had the good fortune to visit with people who came from United States embassies, in whatever subtle way that I could, I tried to find out just how it was that they kept in touch with the State Department back here in Washington. They never would divulge it completely. But the answer was always this, in one form or another, "Well let's say we keep in touch constantly."

> ...Rome was constantly keeping in touch with its outposts. Rome was always in touch with its colonies. It was a distinguishing characteristic, you see. And a distinguishing characteristic of this colony which is Saint Luke Church, which is a colony o f Heaven, is that again and ever so often we keep ourselves in contact with our home base, which permits us our distinguishing characteristic -- to reflect the Christian life-style in the culture and the community of which we are a part. And here when we come together we are constantly being indoctrinated and sustained.

I finished reading yesterday morning -- it doesn't take long to read it, a book that bears the title: "In the Presence of Mine Enemies." Harris and Betty Gustafson are giving it to the library here at Saint Luke because

Harris, who's recently retired as a Commander of the United States Navy, knew personally the man, the main person in this book, Capt. Howard Rutledge, who for seven years was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, five of which were spent in solitary confinement. I give you fair warning, if any of you, from this moment on, ever find me complaining about any annoyance or inconvenience, take me to task when I read what he endured for seven years, it is well-nigh incredible. It's a marvelous testimony to the Christian faith. For, you see, when they were in imprisonment -- not even knowing who the American might be in the cell-block alongside him, above him, or below him, yet realizing that it was an American, they were able to devise the most ingenious methods of communication....

> ...and what did they communicate? -- God be praised! -- verses of Scripture!.....the stanza of a Gospel hymn -- something that came back to him as he remembered his days in that Baptist church in Tulsa, Oklahoma....

I thought to myself as I read the book and put it aside, sooner or later all of us find ourselves in one way or another imprisoned by life and the forces that come to bear against us. And the one thing that makes us free within that imprisonment is the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

That's what happens within this colony of Heaven -- we're being nurtured and sustained and strengthened against those forces that would take us captive. For somewhere in that book he had a great moment when it occurred to him that when he went to talk about the presence of God, he could talk about the presence of God right there in that stinking dungeon, that hell-hole. God was there as God was anywhere. And he said he must always remember that he had to begin at that point. So I say to you, in a world that surrounds us with wicked influences, within this colony of Heaven which is Saint Luke Church --

God is here, and everywhere, where He has chosen people such as He has chosen us.

Now the third characteristic of the colony of Heaven is that when they were put somewhere, they were meant then to scatter into the community, they were not meant to live within the garrison. They went and they dealt in the market-place, and as often as possible they had their children attend the schools in the community. So you and I, in this colony of Heaven which is Saint Luke Church, once the Benediction is pronounced, cannot huddle up and stay here. For a free translation of the Benediction could be: -- "Get with it, now! -- go on! -- you can't stay here! You have got to go out and scatter yourselves and to live as effective witnesses, according to the life-style of the Christian in the culture and the community of which you are part!"

So on this Anniversary Sunday I am happy to remind you of what you are, - - - oh, I am willing to admit that there might be a great gap between what God thinks we ought to be and what we actually are. But then let's constantly endeavor to measure up to what God wants us to be: a colony of Heaven.....

....it's as wonderful as all that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday After The Epiphany — January 20, 1974

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen

First, the text for this brief meditation on this Communion Sunday. It is written in the Good Book as the words of Jesus Christ:

"A new command I give unto you, that you love one another, even as I love you."

Now if you don't mind, let me tell you again a story that you've doubtless heard before. It deserves to be heard repeatedly. And I can readily understand if once you've heard it, you recognize the humor in it and you might chuckle a bit.....

....really, he was a rascal, and most of the people in the village knew it. But now that the doctor had seen him, sick as he was, he got the word that he wasn't long for this world any more. It could be a matter of days, it could be a matter of hours..... ...strangely moved, the old rascal instructed one member of his family to go out into the community and to bring to his room those people whom he had defrauded, or with whom he had very difficult and strained relationships....it was common knowledge.

....So they were herded together and they came into his room. And then this man, presumably nigh unto death, slowly and with bated breath said something to them in this manner:

"I have cheated you, and you know it. I ask you to forgive me."

...and then slowly, with more measured words --

" - - for all the dirty tricks that I pulled on you, I

ask you to forgive me, even as I forgive you all the things you did against me . . . "

...naturally they were deeply moved by what they heard. It was strange behavior. Then they began slowly to walk away and to leave the room, but as they neared the door there was a strange startling surge of spirit in the old codger, and he raised himself up with almost supernatural breath, and he said,

" - - just a minute! - - - but if by any chance I get better, the whole thing's off! - - "

Beyond the humor, of course, is the fallacy of allowing ourselves to believe that forgiveness is something that belongs to the angels, that this is the life-style for those who are nearer to God specifically in Heaven but that right down here on earth forgiveness is not expected to be a way of life, realistic as we are. And so more than one person perhaps falls in the pattern of the old codger, who in the prospect of Judgment and the prospect of the life to come is willing to subscribe to forgiveness, if it's to be practiced in Heaven, but he's not so sure it's to be the way of life here on earth.

Very shortly you and I will be going to the altar of the Lord to receive the Holy Communion. We Lutherans make much of the fact that in the Sacrament Jesus Christ is <u>really present, truly present.</u> That's a great notion. It's a marvelous fact. Recognize this when I tell it to you now: suppose we would have to believe that Jesus Christ was only really present when He lived here on this earth in the flesh, that only the people in Galilean Judea actually knew him, and felt His presence, and knew Him to be real . . . or the other end of the spectrum, that only after you and I have run our course on this

earth and hopefully die and go to Heaven, that we will really get to know Jesus Christ. Wouldn't it be a sad thing if we had to subscribe to either one of these ideas -- that either His presence was in the past, or His presence is something yet to come?

...we Lutherans make much of the fact -- let me repeat it -- that in the Sacrament Jesus Christ is really, truly present -- now!

Scripture is chuck-full with references to the nearness of God. You cherish this one, don't you -- "Where two or three are gathered together, you can count on me being there" -- (that's a free translation, you know the proper one)....

....or that other magnificent statement of our Lord himself:

"I will never leave you! Lo, I am with you always."

...that's something more than way back there then.....that's something more than in some happy day yet to come! It means right now.

Now, put these two things together -- the story of the rascal and the fact that Jesus Christ is truly present as we come to receive the Sacrament, and the command that He gave to us, that we love one another -- now..... that this whole business of loving and forgiving is not something that we begin to practice years hence, or even reserve it for the prospect of Heaven. As you and I come to receive the Sacrament Jesus Christ enters into our hearts, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit empowers us and enables us to live the life of those who are forgiven, and to love one another right now.

So I have a suggestion for you, if you don't mind, a suggestion that comes out of an expression that we borrow from our Roman Catholid brethren, and I dare say it's a very good expression: the Roman Catholic tradition reference is made to people making a 'good Communion' -- that's the way it's put -- people

are encouraged to make a "good Communion."

What in the world do you suppose they mean by that? I'm going to hazard an opinion. I think it means that you make a good Communion only after you have prepared for it, you are truly contrite for your sins, you have asked to be forgiven, you've received absolution.....then you come to receive the Sacrament.

But that does not make it a complete Communion, that does not make it a good Communion yet. To make it a good Communion, then you have to live, once you've received the Sacrament, according to the spirit of Jesus Christ -- as one who has been forgiven. You live it now -- that's what makes a good Communion.

Now the suggestion. You may not have to think very far, and you may not have to probe the recesses of your mind, deep as they may be, to think of someone from whom you have been alienated, and perhaps before the day ends, or the week begins, you might offer to that person the spirit of forgiveness -- today. Then you can have the assurance that you've made a good Communion.

To forgive does not necessarily mean that you have to approve, but it can mean that by the grace of God you would free your own spirit of hatred, and hostility, and alienation . . . and by the grace of God you would ask for reconciliation. Then you can be assured, my friend, that you have made a good Communion. And that's why I can say to you:

"The peace of God that passes all understanding
keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

R.S.

messiah
do. WA April Pa
7/26/88

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday After The Epiphany February 3, 1974

"REMAINING RESOURCES"
(Revelation 3:2)

O GOD, For our own sake we need once more to tell You again what You already know: We make so little time to do this sort of thing that we're about to do now, to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. That we should make the most of it, we would like Your Holy Spirit to help us. Amen.

Not everyone looked upon him as a cynic, but every now and then when he was called upon to give a review of the plays, the cynic in his blood came out full and free, perhaps never more so than when the readers of his articles read this opening line: "I viewed it from a disadvantageous position - - I was facing the stage." The implication is that he was able to see what was going on, and he didn't much like what he happened to have seen. I can't tell you whether the play was mis-cast -- I can't tell you whether it was poorly produced. But I am assuming that as the play progressed, and as he was in full view of everything that was going on, he didn't much care for certain elements that were introduced before the finale.

By that same token, as I stand at this sacred desk, there are some people who take a cynical view of life because they happen to be in a position where they have a full view of all that's going on. And before the curtain drops at the end they don't much like all that they're called upon to see.

Now brace yourself if you don't mind: some of us have lived long enough to recognize that before the curtain will drop we'll be called upon

to look at, inescapably so, the hand that stretches forth itself, robs, murders, consistently wrongs people. Sooner or later, somewhere, someone takes away certain things that we cherish....

...maybe our good name

...maybe our good position

...maybe someone that we love very dearly

...life has a way of doing this. Life, so it seems, can turn robber.

If you're young, you may not be able to appreciate this sermon, because when one is young he's climbing, he's reaching, he's gathering, he's accumulating. But then there may come the plateau period in life, when one no longer gathers and accumulates. And after the plateau there is the frightful thought that some people have to face, that there's the downward slope, the period of diminishing returns, when more and more things seem to be taken away. Now if this should ever happen to you, or if you have the prospect that it could happen to you, then this sermon is meant for you. There are some people who have reached the stage in life today where they say they see nothing but despair, defeat, and who are a disillusioned people.

Not so long ago, I can't tell you just when it was, but there was a church convention being held in the city of Milwaukee. And just before they adjourned in the morning the presiding officer said, "I am about to introduce a strange new element for our agenda this afternoon. We will not come back to the meeting hall after lunch. In fact, we will not come back here again until after dinner tonight. But instead of coming back here and having a conference and workshops and lectures, all of us who are delegates to this conference will be asked to walk the streets of Milwaukee, and look for any ray of hope that they may find in someone or something. And then tonight when we come back we'll have a sharing experience, and we'll talk to one

another about the things that we saw that we can call hopeful."

Now how salutary you might find such an experiment I don't quite know, but I am willing to believe that you've had your moments when you'd be willing to try it, because you are surrounded by all that's depressive and oppressive. Now what is there that one ought to do when life turns robber and when things are being taken away? There is a text for this sermon -- it's from that rather-hard-to-understand Book, the last Book in the Bible. But surprisingly enough, you ought not to find this text from that Book difficult to appreciate. It's the second verse of the third chapter of the Book of the Revelation. God's spokesman is making plain what he wants a certain city and a church in that city to hear. The city happens to be Sardis, the capital city of Lydya in Asia Minor.....

> ...it is no longer as it once was.....its glory has passed away....it's in a period of diminishing return. And the same thing can be said for the church in that city as well as the community itself. And this is rather an embarrassing thing for the Church of Jesus Christ, that it should no longer be as once it was. So God's spokesman exhorts them in plain, unvarnished language by saying, "Your job right now, in the face, if you please, of diminishing returns, is to strengthen what remains."

Now with all the strength that I can command I come to this sacred desk to say to you that that's excellent advice. When life turns robber, what ought you to do? You strengthen what remains. The text immediately, as you look at it, tells you two things:

One, the very precious implication, <u>there will always be something that's left</u> . . .

...and the second implication is that you zero in on what's left, you concentrate on it, and you make the most of it.

Invariably when I walk from 919 Highland Drive, the Parsonage of your Senior Pastor and his family, here to the church, I walk by a bed of transplanted rose bushes. They're not the healthiest-looking rose bushes in the world right now, and I'm quite sure that Rudy Coldenstroth, who was kind enough last year to come and trim them, might take another look at them this year at the proper time. And when he does, in all likelihood he'll cut away on all that's gone....he'll very wisely try not to waste his time or his energy on the branches and the stalk that's absolutely dead! But what will the good pruner do? He concentrates on what's promising, and he nurses that along. Now that's good advice.

Which leads me to tell you that Leo Tolstoy, bless his soul, also wrote a book called MY CONFESSIONS. Augustine is not the only one to have done something like that - - and Tolstoy in his CONFESSIONS says that he's discovered that when life comes upon people rather heavily and begins to take away things that they cherish, like their health, or their job, or a loved one - - - when life becomes very oppressive, he's discovered that there are at least four options that are open to people:

One is this: Commit suicide. Don't try to go on living any longer. Call life a bad mess, in which there is no hope whatsoever. ...and there are people who respond and react just that way, they call it quits...they can't find anything left upon which to build.

Then, says Tolstoy, there are some people who when they respond to life's bitter blow, respond in a very stoical fashion. They say, well if this is it, this is it. And they grin and they

bear it -- not courageously, not triumphantly. But they just accept it.

Then there's the third option which is open to some people. Perhaps it is open to all of us. When life begins to rob us, we refuse to face up to it. We try to pretend that it never happened. And in order to accomplish this, we turn to alcohol, we turn to drugs -- honestly! And the sad thing about that also is that once a fellow sobers up, and once the drug wears off, the situation remains exactly as it was before - - it hasn't changed a bit!

But when life turns robber and evidently tries to defeat us, this is an alternative.

Now none of the three that I've mentioned for you so far can be characterized as Christian alternatives. We have an example in our Lord Jesus Christ, who turned courageously and creatively when life beat its bitter blow, and built upon it - - He strengthened the little that remained.

- -And to this day it's being magnified gloriously.

H. G. Wells very perceptively once observed that he didn't much care for the average crucifix that Christians respect and reverence, I suppose -- he didn't much care for this characterisation of Jesus Christ hanging limp on a cross. But, he said, if he had His way, he'd give the Christians a crucifix alright -- but he'd free that one hand that's outstretched, perhaps the right one, and while the other one might be nailed to the other arm of the cross, he'd raise the right hand with a clenched fist - - as much as to say: "Even in defeat I defy anyone to destroy truth, to destroy the very love of God. Now that's the Christian alternative. It is possible. And

there are those who have done it. And they cry to us from Heaven above -- "Right on! - - bravely, courageously so!"

What now, you ask so earnestly, what does one do when so much that we cherish seems to be taken away from us? It does happen, you know. No one has any guarantee of the kind of security that will keep us from being vulnerable. We could lose our health.....we could lose our job.....we could lose our home.....we could lose our loved ones. What, then, does one do?

There's only one thing to do: you look for what remains, and you build anew upon it. The worst thing that a beaten man can do is to spend his remaining strength lamenting the blows already received. The best thing he can do is to begin to count his blessings all over again. For no matter what happens, some good always remains.

I sat with you -- sure I did -- as many of you watched, deeply moved, the autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman - - almost incredible how a woman who was born to misery could have one precious thing after another taken away from her, and yet be able to reach the age of a hundred and ten -- indomitable! I shan't fault you a bit, my friend, if your eye became moist long before the closing scene, when she sat there by the oak tree and simply reflected upon misery after misery, and then said, "But I sit here and count my blessings" . . . which is simply to say, with one diminishing return after another, some good thing always remained. . .

. . . I dare you to believe it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday After The Epiphany February 3, 1974

"First Communion" - 9:45 a.m.

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

While it should be an established fact that this sermon has rich meaning for all who are here, let me say quite parenthetically, there's something wrong with your spiritual sensitivity if you should be here today and not be deeply moved. So while this service has deep meaning for all who may be here, it has particular meaning for:

...Jenny...and Jeannie...and Barbara....and Carolyn

...and Jean...and Denise...and Sarah...and Renee

...and Lori....and Katin.

At five different times they have sat with the Senior Pastor, together with their teacher, in anticipation of a very precious moment before the altar of God. And now they have come to this day.

The text for this brief meditation, the words of our Blessed Lord, spoken at the time when He first instituted the Sacrament.

"This do in remembrance of me."

Last evening in final preparation for this service, some forty of us were gathered in Bieber Hall, the first Communicants together with their parents and certain others. At a particular point in our meeting together Saul Kohler, one of the parents of a young lady to receive the Sacrament today for the first time, was asked to share with us something of the rich tradition in which he was reared and trained. He knows first-hand the meaning of the Passover. And I dare say he held all of us in the hollow of his hand when he said that the question-of-questions that's put on the

night of the Passover when it's being celebrated devoutly in Jewish homes is this: "Wherein is this night different from any other night?" ...and from that moment on, then, the head of the household begins to recall for all who are present how the hand of God mightily rested on His Chosen People and again and ever so often delivered them, rescued them, and saved them.

Now to our young friends who are about to receive the Sacrament for the first time, you will do well each time you come to receive the Sacrament to ask the question:

"Wherein is this different from anything else?"

The difference lies in the fact that you are being asked to remember, remember something and to remember Someone. And that Someone is God who came to us in the form of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His life that our sins might be forgiven. So each time when you come to receive the Holy Communion you are being asked to remember Him in a very special way. . . . and then to remember particularly what it was that He did. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

It's no secret, of course, and I hope you know why it is that I tell you this, but I look with affection and with gratitude upon the man who happens to be the Assistant Pastor of this congregation. I have more reason than any of you to look with gratitude upon him because once in our relationship together he was the person who saved my life -- he rescued me from drowning. So on occasion when I look at him I remember particularly the one thing that he did for me that needed to have been done that no one else at that particular moment could have done. So, my young friends, when you come to receive the Sacrament, as long as you live remember what Jesus Christ has done for you. And there are some of us who have our lives

constantly renewed and transformed by the things that we remember.

A man's character is determined by the things that he remembers, and your life, from now until the end of your earthly pilgrimage, can be transformed, blessed and sanctified every time you remember Jesus, and particularly when you receive the Sacrament.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TURNABOUT"
(John 3:5)

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

For the moment at least, let's say that the energy crisis is a 'mixed bag' - - that's simply to say it's not all bad. By this time you may have discovered that reduced thermostatic readings could be in many cases a great deal healthier for some of us; and if the gasoline shortage should force us to think twice before we go out to the car and turn on the ignition key to go anywhere, it could result in a sensible economy not only of time but also of gasoline itself.

Now as to that lowered speed limit: I frankly confess that on that first Saturday when I experimented with it, complying voluntarily, I was delightfully surprised to discover that when I arrived at my destination, having driven all the way an average of 50 miles an hour or a little below that, I was much more relaxed and much more composed and far readier for my meeting than I think I would have been had I driven at that higher rate of speed, 70 miles an hour for the greater part. And in addition to all that, driving at a slower pace, one can see the scenery as he had not quite observed it before, to say nothing of being able to read the road signs.

There was a man who in those happier days of just a few short months ago took that trip across country, and when he arrived on the West Coast he came to the conclusion that in all likelihood he had traveled some 5,000 miles, and he likewise concluded that had he kept a record of all the road

signs that he had seen, that the number could have reached perhaps 6,000. Then he waxed philosophical for the moment, and he happened to remember what someone had done as he remembered these road signs, particularly those put up by the state highway departments - - he said they could be categorized in at least four different groups:

> - - first, he said, there would be the moralistic ones, the signs that read such as these - - "KEEP RIGHT" - - "GO SLOW" "CAUTION" - - "LOW GEAR" - - "REDUCE SPEED" - - "NO PASSING" - - "PROCEED WITH CARE" - - -
>
> - - then, he said, the second grouping could be the psychological ones - - "HIDDEN ENTRANCE" - - "SINGLE LANE"
>
> - - he had a third grouping, would you believe it, and this he labeled the sensuous ones - - "SOFT SHOULDERS" . . . . and up in New Jersey and New York -- it's a fact -- there are signs that read: "SQUEEZE AHEAD"
>
> - - then the last grouping -- the existential ones - -
> "DEAD END" - - "NO EXIT"

As I travel along I am, as you might suspect, quite taken by the signs that have a religious connotation, put up by well-meaning, nobly-intentioned folk, despite their lack of the esthetic touch. Some are crudely printed . . . I think of one that I invariably pass on our way home -- you have to slow down to cross the bridge, and then there is this hillside that almost comes down upon you, and dominating it is this huge rock on which some ambitious chap has crawled up and scrawled there "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD."

The other one is a searching question in the religious signs: "WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?"

...and of course the most popular of all of them:

"YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN"

I muse to myself and wonder what people think when they read these signs, if they think at all -- "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD" . . .

...it could have a very morbid aspect, you see....as though yours could be the next fatal accident around the turn, failing to include the very pleasant thought that when one does meet his God, it could be -- you get that -- it could be -- a very happy and joyous occasion, because God is a God of love, and when one meets Him as the slogan implies, gleaned from a Scriptural passage, he could meet Him in the company of those who have gone to be in His nearer presence, all the loved ones with whom some day we hope to have cherished reunion.....but I'm not so sure that he reacts that way when he reads the sign: "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD"

And then the probing one: "WHERE WILL YOU SPEND ETERNITY?" . . .

...as though Eternity is something that's yet to happen in the far future. We make much of the fact that Eternity indludes the here and the now, and happy is the man who allows himself to believe, as well he might, that already he's caught up within the eternity of things, and already he can enjoy the blessings which God has for those who are already enjoying Eternal Life -- this aspect of it.

Now as to "YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN." . . . I'm not so sure that the average person understands that. It causes some people a great deal of perplexity. I'm not so sure that the person to whom those words, as we under-

them, were first spoken understood them. You do remember, don't you, that there was thie very fine fellow who came to Jesus Christ under cover of darkness -- Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night -- and don't you dare fault him for coming by night. Whatever may have been the reason that prompted him to go by night, the fact is that he went -- he did have his precious moments with Jesus Christ.....and then in their encounter Jesus Christ brings him up quickly and says, "But, Nicodemus, I know what your problem is, brother -- except you be born again of the spirit you cannot enter the Kingdom of God! Nicodemus -- you've got to be born again!"

I don't know that Nicodemus fully understood that. I don't know that you and I fully understand it. But I do say to you with all the strength that my soul can command as I stand at this sacred desk, that we never really appreciate the Christian experience until we've gained some appreciation for the fact of re-birth...conversion....re-generation. It's a necessary ingredient. It is a basic element of the Christian experience. You read for yourself the pages of the New Testament as though you'd never read it before and be absolutely captivated, how every now and then person after person is someone whose life has been turned around, whose life has been re-generated, whose life has been transformed - - - who discovers himself within the circle of believers, and not outside.....who can speak first-hand and say that he knows that he is in Christ, and that being in Christ, he is, as Saint Paul puts it so magnificently according to the J. B. Phillips' translation: "a brand new person altogether."

Now what troubles some people is this, that they feel that they have missed something because they've not had the re-birth in the same way that other people have had the re-birth, that the re-generation has not set in in

the same precise manner that it has set in in somebody else. Now I want to speak to that if you don't mind.

First, disabuse yourself of the notion that re-birth and conversion and re-generation, that these are things that happen only to rascals who come under the grace of God, that they happen only to people who have been the worst of sinners. Do I surprise you when I tell you that when Jesus Christ said to a man, "You must be born again" - - he was saying those words to a very decent chap, to a man, if he were living today and would be a member of Saint Luke Church, we might even look upon him as a kind of exemplary member. He was very moral. He was even a leader in the Jewish religion. It was to this man that Jesus said, "You must be born again."

> ...so disabuse yourself of the notion that you have to go out and commit all kinds of sin and go to the very depth before you can know what it is, by the grace of God, to be transformed.

The second thing I'd like to say to you is, if you were to press me against the wall and say, "Pastor, can you tell us when you were re-born?" - - the precise time, I can't do it. I can't have the same kind of situation, if one seems to believe this to be the prerequisite, that John Wesley had. Bless his soul, no matter where he went he was able to tell people -- was it May 25 in the year 1735 at quarter-to-nine in the evening in Aldersgate Street Mission, when some chap happened to be talking about what Luther had to say regarding the Epistle to the Romans...and it was then and there, as though he were putting his finger exactly on it, that he said in that classic manner, "I felt myself strangely warmed -- I felt my heart strangely warmed."

Or if you're keeping yourself up to date, as is recommended reading

for this parish, that day by day we read a chapter in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, you know what happened in the life of that man Paul -- where the change was so dramatic at a particular place and time...and from that moment on he became Paul, and no matter where he went he kept thinking about that particular experience on a particular road.

Now some of us can't do that. But we do permit ourselves to believe that we're numbered among the re-born. We're numbered among those who are being re-generated. We're numbered among those whose lives are being turned around. For me, my friend, I am happy to say, it's a continuation, it's been an increasing, a gradual revelation, which has certain moments (listen carefully) that seem to be highlights, when it all seems to be enhanced -- certain periods when the transforming, the renewal, sets in all over again. Did you ever think of it that way?

Now any sermon that's to be preached on turn-about Christians will command your respect as I hope this sermon will command your respect because it's being preached autobiographically. I have no right to preach to you about this if I cannot bear testimony from my own soul - - to wit:

> - - my confirmation, while it meant something to me as a youngster of twelve years of age, had a re-generating, transforming and enhancing touch when I placed my hand in blessing and confirmed one of my own -- flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood and I hope spirit of my spirit. Not that my confirmation at twelve years of age meant nothing to me, but it meant ever so much more to me when I saw it through his eyes and through his experience.

God allows us such times of renewal, and enhancement. And I think this must be recognized as a part of the re-birth experience.

And then if you permit me to tell you -- when I had the good fortune to take his first-born and hold him in the crook of my arm and to name him for Jesus Christ - - not only the baptism of that child took on added significance but also the baptism of his father, and my baptism, took on added significance. Why not? Says Martin Luther, bless his soul, that every single day that we live we Christians should recognize the validity of our baptism all over again.

I'm reluctant to tell you this, because I don't care to expose weaknesses in my soul in your presence, and yet the testimony may serve a purpose . . . not that I ever failed to appreciate her, but it was only after I walked away from the place where I had laid her to rest that it occurred to me in a very real way that it was this woman, my mother, who first taught me to pray -- who as no other person on the face of the earth introduced to me the fact of God! Not until I was in my mid-50's did I begin to appreciate all over again what I'd like to think was always there. So what I am saying to you, my friend, as one who believes in Jesus Christ -- look for the moments of rapture -- enlightenment -- transformation, that can come again and again in your onward growth and development, in your spiritual pilgrimage -- in which you become increasingly aware of the fact that you are a child of God.....and that nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever break that bond between God and you.

How did that transformation take place in the likes of Nicodemus? I have two things to suggest to you that you ought not fo forget:

One, being a believer in God, he didn't have a completely adequate idea of God - - he thought of God only in the sense of power, a performer of miracles. You and I are born-all-over-again when we discover that God is something more than a God-of-power. He's a

> God of redeeming love. Nicodemus had the transformation and the re-birth set in, I dare say, when it was established when he realized that goodness is not goodness just because we do good, but true goodness is goodness because of the spirit that prompts it. And this is always something that happens from within.

The truly good deed is done by the good man, and the good man is created by the good heart that's touched by the grace of God!

Surely in the time of Judgment God will look upon us and judge us -- I warn you -- as His spokesman....He will judge us not only on the basis of what we've done but above all else He will judge us on the basis of why we did what we did....."Except you are born of the spirit ye cannot enter the Kingdom of God - - you must be born again."

I have been going to see our friend Frank Gunther who is a patient in the hospital, at least he was up until yesterday. Day before yesterday when I went to see him, I came just as he was listening to the newscast. When it was finished he turned to me and said rather philosophically - - "It's all bad news, Pastor -- no good news -- all bad news."

> ...I get quite excited when occasionally the Assistant Pastor reads the Lessons and he announces the Third Lesson. He doesn't always do things according to the book. The book says the Third Lesson is to be announced: "The Holy Gospel for the Day is written in . . . " But if you've noticed, he comes to that point and in his own manner he says: "The Good News - - "

...with almost a lilting quality in his voice . . . and then he reads for us the Gospel.

Well, I am happy to tell you this is what the Christian religion is always about -- to remind us that there is Good News, that it is possible to

be constantly exposed to the grace of God by which the transforming touch sets in. This I most certainly believe. It's the Good News - -

- - for today - - for tomorrow - - and to the end of time.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Sixth Sunday After The Epiphany February 17, 1974

"OF A FAULT AND A FORGIVENESS"
(Philemon 15)

MAKE US quiet before Thee, O God,
that perchance in this place and
at this time we could hear the
echo of Your voice down the cor-
ridor of Eternity. Amen.

Let me tell you at once that the introductory remarks dealing with today's sermon are a mixture of fact and speculation. But relax, my good friend, you need have no fear, I know exactly who I am and why I am here and the responsibility that rests upon me to proclaim the truth of the Gospel. So I shall not confound you, nor shall I deceive you. And if you need it, I'll separate the fact from the speculation for you as I go along.

Now let's deal with some of the facts . . .

There did live in a town called Colossae a man named Philemon, who was married to a woman named Apphia, and together they had a son named Archippus....

....I can also give you this as a fact, that there came to that city of Colossae on a certain occasion a traveling preacher, his name was Paul.....

Now how Philemon and the traveling preacher first met I can only speak now by way of speculation. It may have been that Philemon has a neighbor, and the neighbor came to him and said, "Philemon, I've just heard that a new preacher has come to town. His reputation has preceded him, he speaks very earnestly, and he tells us things that we've never heard before. He gives a different understanding about the nature and character of God. Philemon, I'm going tonight and I think you ought to come along." - - it may

HAVE HAPPENED THAT WAY. I can't give that to you as factual information. But it doesn't hurt to give it to you by way of speculation.

...or it may have been that the night the traveling preacher had come to Colossae, Philemon had strange stirrings within him. You can never quite tell how the Holy Spirit is going to work! - - and restive and restless, Philemon took to the streets, and as he was walking about rather aimlessly, he heard people singing . . . and there is in every man a desire to follow a song until he finds its source - - - which Philemon, I say to you by way of speculation, may have done. And when he got to the place where people were singing, he discovered that a band of Christians were gathered together, and before he knew it he found himself crossing the threshhold and becoming part of the group. And after a while it came time for the preacher-come-to-town to speak. I think Philemon was held spellbound -- it does happen that way sometimes -- he was captivated by the interpretation of the sacred truth. God uses people that way. And then when the service was over, Philemon tarried. And he said to the new preacher-come-to-town, "You hit me tonight, preacher, you opened my eyes to some things that I had never known before. Won't you come and be a guest in my household? I'd like you to meet my wife, I'd like you to meet my son."

...now mark you, I cannot give this to you by way of fact, it's only speculation. But it doesn't hurt to speculate this way. If you can come up with something better, very well, my friend.

But at any rate, let's say the preacher went to visit in the home of Philemon.

And there he met his wife and there he met his son. But I don't know whether or not he ever met, the first time he crossed the threshhold of Philemon's house, another member of that household. His name was Onesimus, a

servant, a slave -- one of 60 million slaves in the whole Roman Empire. Now by way of speculation, I'd like to think that one of two things could have happened . . .

> -- when the slave brought in the heated water in the basin for the guest to wash his feet before he sat down to eat, the eyes of the slave met the eyes of the man-of-God. And something happened. The slave found something in these eyes that he had never found in the eyes of any other man. And I'd like to believe that the slave didn't quite forget . . .
>
> -- or it may be that their eyes never met at all, and the slave had to keep his place, and in that respectful distance that separated him from the guest, Onesimus kept looking at this man-of-God and found him somewhat different.

Now there you have it -- a mixture of fact and speculation.

But let's hurry on with the story. As the record has it, the slave ran away. Now why did he run *away*? I can only speculate, my friend. Would you be willing to believe that maybe he ran *away* because he got sick and tired of the new dose of religion that Philemon introduced into his household because it's a matter of record that Philemon took his new Christian experience so seriously that he turned his house into a church, and people gathered there for worship. And the slave got sick and tired of it, sick and tired of hearing those people sing those hymns, sick and tired of all the new work-load that was added to his responsibilities, the extra water that had to be drawn and carried and heated . . . more people for whom food had to be prepared, cleaning up after they had gone. And so because he was fed up with their religion, he ran *away* . . . maybe . . . who knows!

Or it may be that one *day* he and Philemon had a quarrel over some trivial

matter. Or, if you please, while you speculate, it could be that some well-meaning civil-rights worker had come to Colossae, and somewhere he had met the slave and he lit the torch of freedom within the soul of Onesimus, and Onesimus became impatient with his lot and permitted himself to believe that he was born to be free, not to be in bondage. And so when he had his chance, he ran away, without any so much as a fare-thee-well and a goodbye to his master. And what is more (I am sorry to have to tell you this) when he ran away he took with him some stolen objects from the household.

All right, now let's separate the fact from the speculation:

-- a man names Philemon, who lived in a town called Colossae, married a woman called Apphia with a son called Archippus, had a slave named Onesimus . . .

-- Paul-the-preacher came to Colossae . . . Paul befriended them and they feasted him -- they had a bond between each other.

-- eventually the slave runs away, and as he takes with him the stolen objects to hand over to a fence somewhere, he has enough money then to get him on his way, all the way to the place where eventually all runaways ended, the Imperial City of Rome, where they could be safe.

Now what do you suppose happened in Rome? -- of all things, he ran into the preacher! -- that new preacher who had come to Colossae, a man who had been a guest in the home of his master.

Now if you were to ask me, was this part of God's plan, I'd say yes! And if you were to ask me was he running away because he was fed up with religion, I'd say maybe, but I know this to be true, that in God's plan what he was running away from was what he was meant to run to! And so he runs smack into the preacher Paul one day. But what I'd much rather tell you is this:

unhappy soul that he was as a slave, in that chance meeting - - - ah, you dare say that in the name of Christ nothing's chance! - - - but in that meeting with the preacher God put before him an agent, an agent of reconciliation to whom eventually he was drawn as by a magnet.

Now let me pause for a moment and tell you, something that I don't think you'lllike to hear, and your displeasure at what I'm going to tell you perhaps will be determined by your experience and your own personality and your own temperament. But this is what you probably won't like to hear: down deep in every one of us -- that means in you, and in me, there is always something of the rascal. The church has a classic term for it -- we call it the stain of original sin. But be that as it may for the moment, down deep inside of us there is always something of the rascal and eventually it may have its hour.

It may take us far down the wrong road. And depending upon the circumstances and the person himself, only God knows how much irreparable damage could be done. But suppose when the rascal emerges, what happens? Well I can only tell you on the basis of this letter to Philemon - - - estrangement sets in. The degree of alienation is firmly established. Oh, by the way, you ought to read this letter that Paul wrote to Philemon. It has only 25 verses. Sad to say, many Christians live and die without having read the letter, and read aloud at a moderate pace and much the same as I'm speaking to you now, you can read that letter to Philemon in two minutes and about twelve seconds. It's a magnificent treatise.....

...now let's go back again . . . estrangement had set in between these two people, the master and the runaway slave. Undoubtedly Philemon was hurt, his pride had a terrific blow because he was a Christian, and now in the face of the Christian community he had to admit that a man within his own household was so treated that he could no longer stand to remain. And whatever it was that caused Onesimus to run away, it surely must not have

been a very pleasant thing. So now, then, look upon it as estrangement.

Now this sermon has been meant for you and for me to be very practical. It could be if you wanted to you could probe your own heart and know how at this time or that time we have had strained relationships with people. Relationships have been broken. Now what do you do? Let's look quickly at the options.

One option is this: you can begin to rationalize, and when you do that you will be prone to blame everybody under the sun except yourself.

Secondly, you can consider that you yourself have been wronged, and because you have been wronged, you can say to yourself a correction needs to be made, and it needs to be done by the person who wronged me. Retribution is in order - - pay! - - pay! - - pay! - - - and I'll never have done with this thing until it's corrected in that way and full payment is made.

Another option is this: once wrong has been done and relationship has been strained, you can in all good conscience say to yourself, let's set about setting up security measures to make certain that this thing never happens again.

- - - now any one of these is good -- please don't misunderstand me -- but in the sight of Jesus Christ they are not good enough, taken by itself or altogether, because not one of them is truly positive. And the Christian way of handling a situation of estrangement is always to accentuate the positive - - "Let's do what we can to correct, and in the correcting of the thing to improve it!" . . . and I am happy to tell you that out of our own experience.

We have a piece of antique furniture that once was broken, and after the broken thing had been mended and restored to us, it's far stronger than it was when we first got it. And this is a happy thing to remember. Alright then, in God's plan -- don't let me lose you -- in God's plan the runaway is

in front of the preacher and the preacher is God's agent as the reconciling one, the restorer, and by the grace of God the runaway -- would you believe it -- becomes a Christian! Don't ever sell the grace of God short! He became such a good Christian that Paul was reluctant to give him up. He was happy to have him. But then Paul writes a letter to Philemon and he says, "He's coming back, and you should take him back."

Now I am fully aware that there are two schools of thought in this whole counseling bit. There's a school of thought in counseling that says you never make up anybody's mind for himself. You just wait and wait and wait until they can see the light for themselves....

> ....then there is another school of thought that doesn't hesitate -- when they recognize right for what it is and evil for what it is, they call it by its rightful name, and they don't hesitate to say to the person who's come for counseling: "This is what you ought to do."

Well, in no uncertain manner that's what Paul says to Philemon -- "Take him back! And when you take him back I want to tell you something . . . I honestly believe --" (and this is the 15th verse of that Letter for you)

> "For perhaps he therefore departed
> for a season, that thou shouldst receive
> him forever."

" - - - Philemon, look at what you can learn from this whole experience. Let the grace of God do something to you as the grace of God has done something to Onesimus, and the net result will be that you'll have something finer on your hands than you've ever had before."

You know very well, of course you do, that after 33 years in the ministry and after spending 18 years with people like you, more and more of you come to me asking counsel and advice, particularly when relationships have become estranged.

And you know what I look for for the first time when you come to me? - - the kind of material that you bring and the earnest desire on your part to have reconciliation set in. The pieces may be broken, but if the material is good, the adhesive which is the grace of God has something with which to work. So therefore, my friend, take heart, as Thornton Wilder once observed - - "Happy is the association that can grow out of a fault and a forgiveness."

Up in Pennsylvania the State Highway Department knows the annoyance with which it has to deal when people have to encounter a detour. Some clever chap has come up with this phraseology, and I hope he got a promotion because of it - - - "The inconvenience is temporary . . . the improvement is permanent."

My friend, when relationships are estranged for you, by the grace of God take heart - - they can be restored - - they can be improved. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON BEING QUIETLY CONFIDENT"
(Isaiah 30:15)

O GOD, The world is too much with us. It makes too many noises, and we're pushed around. And we haven't much time to think about You. But right now in this place we would like to think about You, and if Your Holy Spirit will help us, we might be able to give You a better measure of attention. Let it happen. Amen.

Life has been pictured in many ways, of course. For our purpose this morning let me suggest that life is like an old ugly money-lender. Now why in the world would I tell you that it could be said that life is like an old ugly money-lender? Well let me tell you a story, then you might better understand.

I read the story this past week for the first time, and having read it, it struck me as though it could be legendary, the kind of thing that one generation would pass on to another. There was this old ugly money-lender who delighted in contriving situations, maneuvering and manipulating people into a corner, and then taking advantage of them.

Well, one day he loaned a sum of money to a merchant. The merchant suffered financial reverses, and it came time to re-pay the loan and he was unable to do so. The old ugly money-lender pressed him against the wall...and then he came up with a diabolical scheme-of-sorts. He said, "I'll tell you what we'll do - - - you have a very lovely attractive daughter. This is the scheme: standing where we are on this pebble-strewn walk, I'll reach down and put two pebbles into this bag that I have -- it's an empty bag -- and one pebble will be black and one pebble will be white. And if your daughter picks the black pebble, she becomes my wife and your debt will be cancelled. If she takes the

white one, she stays with you, and your debt will still be cancelled."

...well, the merchant agreed. The old ugly money-lender reaches down now to pick up two pebbles -- the rascal -- only the lovely lady sees exactly what he does ...and puts them in the bag.

Now I know exactly what you're thinking - - - she's trapped. There's no way out of the situation. And that's the say some of us react to life these days. We say we're being trapped, the pressures come from here and the pressures come from there. If we had an old-fashioned testimonial meeting right now, some of you might make bold to stand up and tell us how you're trapped . .

...trapped in the situation where you happen to work, and you just don't know how to get out of it, and you have been trapped for so long that you say "There's no way out!

...some of you are trapped where you live -- it's not a very happy situation, and for any number of reasons you still can't find a way out, and the situation seems hopeless...

....some of you might confess that you're trapped with yourself. You've taken a good long look at what you happen to be, and you're not pleased with it. And due to certain mitigating circumstances, you don't know how you can extricate yourself from yourself....and so you say you're trapped....

-- some of us react that way to the energy crisis -- we're trapped -- we're powerless to do anything about it....

-- some of us react that way to the international scene....

-- some of us react that way to the national scene, and we spend a great deal of our time, far more than we should, just going

around talking to ourselves and hearing the echo of our own voices -- there's no way out -- we're trapped.

Well, let's go back to that story again, do you mind? There is more to that story than I told you. The lovely lady, she reached down into the bag in which there are two pebbles -- remember now, she had seen what the rascal had done -- so very cleverly, when she reaches into the bag she pulls her hand out quickly and in a rather clumsy fashion deliberately allows it to fall onto the pebble-strewn walk which has all kinds of pebbles in it. She says, "Forgive me, I'm such a clumsy one, but don't worry -- there's still another pebble in there, and by looking at that one you can know which one I drew." Well the rascal knew exactly what he had done, and he dared not admit it.

....now aren't you ashamed for thinking to yourself that there was no way out! But that's the way we are, you see! It's the power, as someone said, of negative thinking -- there's no way out.

Well now, all of this leads us to the text. I'm reaching back into the days of the Old Testament. There was a prophet by the name of Isaiah -- you can read it for yourself as the 15th verse of the 30th chapter of this man's prophecy. It's an interesting bit of history, and God be praised if you have an historian's blood coursing through your veins, because you always have an advantage if you can see things from the historical perspective.

Isaiah discovered that the people in his day were beginning to panic, because they were being boxed in, they were being cornered, they were being contrived against, and as a tiny kingdom they were at the mercy of the Assyrians to the north and the Egyptians to the south, and they had diplomats worth a dime-a-dozen who were going like mad, entering into all kinds of al-

liances, and there were all types of military strategy.

Now don't get me wrong -- I'm very happy when I know that military strategy is in the hands of a very shrewd person, and I'm very happy when our diplomacy is in the hands of someone who is unusually astute. We live in a world where we need this kind of thing. But one doesn't stop at that point, even as Isaiah didn't stop at that point, and when he discovered that his people were beginning to panic because they saw some of these alliances were breaking down and some of this military strategy wasn't paying off. And they began to think that they were being boxed in and there was no way out.

And there was this man of God who stood up with all of his strength and said, "I know what your problem is, brother -- you are succumbing to the power of negative thinking because you're ruling out the fact of God! With God there is always a way out or a way through, for the simple fact that God is the Lord of history." And as I told some of you before, I'm impressed as I read the Bible all over again from cover to cover as though I had never read it before, to discover how the God of history is at work! And He will not be over-ruled, and He will not be shoved around - - - maybe for a season, but eventually the purposes of God will be served, and we need to remember this.

In capsule fashion I say to you, when you're prone to think that you're trapped, the Bible reminds us that with God there is always either a way through or a way out - - - take heart.

Now Isaiah says that in order to remember this, and in order not to panic:

> "Return unto the Lord, for in quietness and in
> confidence shall be your strength."

When we panic we are always crippled, we're always weakened when we become panicky.

Sounds like double talk, really. But that's what the sign said: 'Busy thy soul with quietness.' And it was found, of all places, in a physician's waiting room. It constitutes a rather happy blend of religion and medicine, wouldn't you say, since the apostle Paul used to counsel people to 'study to be quiet.' And long, long before the Galilean-Gospel proclaimer was making His rounds there was a lyric writer who said something about "Be still and know God." What our age needs, I think, more than anything else, is to be quiet long enough to deal with the God-perspective, to hear God. Now God doesn't shout -- God whispers. And you need to be made quiet in order to hear a whisper.

Now I'll grant you it takes a bit of doing to learn how to be quiet. I don't know that we've mastered it. I'm reasonably certain that if right now I walked down from this pulpit and sat alongside of Mark, and then for twenty minutes this service was given over to the ministry of silence, I would have an uneasy congregation on my hands.....you'd begin to fidget...some of you might even get up and walk out....some of you might want to check with an usher to see if the Pastor was ill.....some of you might wonder whether the organ failed, because you think we ought to sing a hymn at that point. Some of you who were here last Sunday heard me announce that because we have the good fortune in Saint Luke to have Vespers the year around, we can have a variety of services during the Vesper Period, so last Sunday we announced that when we came to Vespers we would spend the half-hour in the ministry of silence, in the manner of the Society of Friends. The Quakers have mastered the art of silence, and I would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that when 5:00 o'clock came I was very, very apprehensive because I just didn't know how it would come off because people need to learn how to handle being quiet. Well

relax. I'm happy to tell you it came off perfectly beautifully and I hope some time we can do it again.

Some years back I was in of necessity spending three days incommunicado in a hospital while a series of tests was being taken. I was forced into idleness. I planned no meetings, scheduled no meetings, went to no meetings, received very, very few if any visitors. And while I waited for the time between the tests I read some books. And one of the books that I read was the autobiography of Mahatma Ghandi -- a man who in my judgment has done more than any other single person in our generation to touch the fabric of humanity in the different parts of the world. When he died, what did he leave behind him? -- a pair of spectacles, a loin-cloth, some books, and the legacy of his spirit. How was it possible for this man to transform the world? -- by his ideology, by his adherence to certain basic principles? Well I discovered it in his autobiography - - - he took one day out of seven which was set aside as a quiet day, time that was given to contemplation and meditation. That was the secret of his strength.

And I have something to say to you, that if you were to ask me, what is the strength of Saint Luke Church? -- I'd be happy if I could tell you it's when you come together like this, to be nurtured and to be edified and to strengthen one another by your fellowship. But I'm also happy to tell you that the strength of Saint Luke Church lies in the fact that every single day there are certain people in this parish who are setting aside a portion of each day, no matter how brief, just to be quiet, to become in tune with God, and to see things from the divine perspective.

That's really what it means to be made quiet! "Return unto the Lord" said the prophet -- 'for in being quiet you shall become strong, and you shall become confident.' This I most certainly believe. And I dare you, if you don't believe it now, to find it out for yourself.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The First Sunday in Lent March 3, 1974

"A MAN NAMED PETER"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Come now, let me ask you what could be a rather embarrassing question, embarrassing if you attempted to answer it, but I'll spare the rest of us the answer. This is the question: Did it ever occur to you how many people there are whose personalities you would like to change, if it were within your power to do so?

...and I suppose I could add very quickly that any number of people would be perfectly willing to return the compliment, and change your personalities if they could . . .

Which leads me to ask you to face rather boldly now the question: Are you numbered among those who honestly believe that human nature can be changed?

I get it from both sides of the fence. There are people who come to me and say, "Pastor, you can't change human nature! A person happens to be what he is, and no matter what happens, to the end of time he'll go on being that kind of a person!"

- - on the other hand, there are those of you who come with glowing reports of the transformation that has taken place in people's lives, seemingly today they are as different as night is from day.

Now I should say that if you were to ask me, where do I stand? - - well I suppose I ought to say quite quickly I hope you wouldn't have to ask me. I hope you know that I believe in the power of God, and for those who would be His agents, that it is possible for people to change.

Now if you were to press me very hard and say, "But can basic human nature be changed?" - - - I'd have to add rather quickly that there is a school of thought that sometimes commands my respect which maintains that what's basic in human nature doesn't change, but what is possible is that you can re-direct it. You can take a certain person whose life is characterized by a particular kind of energy, and by proper motivation you may get that person, instead of working _against_ something, get him to work _for_ it. There are those who believe this.

Now I suppose according to your experience you may end up and say, Yes, human nature can be changed . . .

. . . or you may say, No, I don't believe it.

Well long before I became a pastor, long before I permitted myself to be steeped in Scripture, I knew something about education. And when I was a student of Latin I began to understand that _educate_ comes from the Latin word _e duco_, which means _to lead out from_ - - to build upon what is down deep inside. And education can be understood this way: that it's _directing_ a person's life.

Now realizing full well that I happen to be the person that I am -- let me say it to you unashamedly, a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and one who on occasion could stand up and say, "Look at me -- I'm Exhibit A of what can happen by the grace of God!" - - - I read the New Testament, and I'm greatly impressed by the way Jesus Christ brought a transforming touch to the lives of certain people.

I dare you to read the New Testament as though you had never read it before and to discover for yourself all over again how again and ever so often people's lives were changed just because they were encountered by

Jesus Christ, or by someone who reflected His mind and His spirit. (I'm speaking, of course, if their lives were changed for the better).

A good example is that man Zaccheus, one of my favorite Bible characters. I stood one day underneath a sycamore tree at the entrance to Jericho, and I tried to re-live that experience, when Jesus came to Jericho, and surely He had heard as He had His antenna up, that in Jericho there was a man despised by his fellow Jews . . . he was a scoundrel, he was a rascal, he was fraudulent - - - he took advantage of his own people! Then there was that time -- put it that way, there was that time -- when he was encountered by Jesus Christ, and the Scriptures for it, he was given a transforming touch, his life was re-directed, his life was converted! -- turned around completely! From having been a rascal, a grabber, he became a generous giver. It actually happened.

Now with all of that by way of background, I want you to know that during these Sunday mornings in Lent I want to talk to you each succeeding Sunday on men whose lives were made, men whose lives were changed by the touch of the Master. Today it's that man Peter.

Now what do you know about Peter? I presume that I could say this in your behalf, that of all the disciples, he's the one perhaps whose name comes first to your mind. Even if you can't name all the twelve, I'd be willing to wager that if you could only name three, if you could only name two, Peter would always be included.

And I think that's true for several reasons:

One, I think he gets more coverage in the New Testament than any other person outside of Jesus Christ. Now if you want to test me, you read the New Testament for yourself and see if the evidence doesn't come out that way - - gets more coverage, looms more frequently on the horizon, seems to be the center of attention. Well that's one reason, I think, you know Peter

as well as you do.

And then the second reason is a very understandable one: he's most like us, and we are most like him. For want of a better expression, I'd like to say, maybe he's the most human of all the disciples. He'd wax hot, he'd wax cold.....

- - he was courageous.....and he was cowardly

- - he was making big promises....and then other times
he'd fall flat on his face

- - he really wanted to serve his Master....and again and
ever so often he confronted his Master with disappointment.

Now because he happened to have been this kind of a person, I'm willing to say that he has a tug on your heart, and in your more sober moments you may say to yourself, "Well if Jesus Christ could re-make a man like Peter, then maybe there is hope for me."

Now at this point I want to tell you what I've told you before, and maybe as long as I'm your Pastor there will be continued repetition of this, and you can well afford to hear it repeated. It may hold you in good stead far more often than you may care to admit. It's a simple observation:

Every saint has his past;

And every sinner has his future.

....it can be reduced to something as simple as that.

Now let's get back to this man Peter. How was it possible for him to be transformed, his life, his energies, to be re-directed? Well, I'm happy to tell you I think it happened because someone believed that it could happen, and that someone was no less than the Son of God himself. The classic expression of Scripture is the text for today's meditation, the 42nd verse of the 1st chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Thou art Simon the son of Jonah - - thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone."

Now if you don't mind, I want to be a little bit reckless. I'm going to give you a perfectly free translation of that test. It might go something like this: It happened one day that Jesus Christ, the wandering preacher, met a man named Peter. And when He saw Peter He looked at him very earnestly, and He gave him the nod, and He beckoned to him.....which was as much as to say, "Peter, I want to talk to you all by yourself." And when He got him away from the crowd and there were just the two of them, the wandering preacher looked the fisherman in the eye and said, "Peter, I have been sizing you up for some time, and I have something that I want to tell you. I know what people say about you -- they keep reminding you what your name means -- you're the son of Jonah. That means the son of a dove. Now I know, Peter, that a dove is a very fragile thing, and maybe you're very fragile. You rise quickly and you fall just as quickly. Peter, I have news for you - - - the day is going to come when people will look at you and they'll say you're as solid as a rock! I'm making this prediction, Peter, because I believe in you. I want to tell you something else: if you just stick with me, if you'll just listen to me, if you'll just follow closely, if you're willing to be my man, it will happen!. . "

...well that's my free and rather reckless translation of

"Thou art Simon the son of Jonah -- thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone."

Now you're not forgetting what we said just a moment ago -- the transformation of Peter was possible because somebody believed that this was possible. Somebody appealed to his better nature, somebody was willing to draw out the positive forces in his life, and to keep appealing to them. I don't mind

telling you rather parenthetically, there are some people I shy away from because after I have been with them for a while I discover that they draw out the negative qualities in my life. It doesn't do me too much good to spend too much time with them. Contrary-wise, of course, and beautifully so, there are those with whom I do associate who appeal to my better nature, and I am better because of it. Well, it happened with Peter because Jesus Christ honestly believed down deep inside of him there was this potential.

You know very well the high regard that I have for the Quakers. I suppose they first captivated me because when I first studied them I discovered that they perhaps as much as any group of believers in God go on the assumption that there is that which is of God in every man . . . there is that which is of God in every man! - - - and they go looking for it! - - and they build upon it.

Our friend Bruce, who is here this morning, who lived for some time in the Muslim world, might be acquainted with the fact that the old Arab philosopher used to say that the devout Muslim would never so much as agnore an insignificant scrap of paper, because the devout Muslim would say that paper is important because small as it may be, insignificant as it may be, the name of Allah, the name of God can still be written upon it. And there are those who honestly believe that no matter how defaced the image, something of God can still be found in every man - - - look for it! and build upon it!

The second thing I must tell you is this: that Jesus Christ, having believed that the good was there, was very patient. The good didn't always come to the surface. You see, a fact that you and I dare not ignore is this, that we are stained by original sin. I honestly believe this. And if you want a free translation of original sin, it's the inclination that's always down deep inside us to turn toward evil - - - you never completely get rid

of that desire. Washed as you may be (to use the old ecclesiastical jargon) ....washed as you may be by the blood of the Lamb, this side of the Great Gate you're never completely free of original sin. Properly understood, according to good Lutheran theology, we're sinners to the day we die, but the difference is we're sinners who are being saved! And I give this to you as I think of the unfolding life of that man Peter - - - again and ever so often, even to the very end after he had been in the company of Jesus Christ for three years, it's Peter who denied Him.....it's the Peter who said he never would, but he did! And it took a great deal of patience on the part of Jesus Christ to go on dealing with him. And that's the lesson that you and I have to master in our relationships with people. By the grace of God we can't afford to run out of patience.

Now that doesn't mean that you can't be firm. Anyone who deals with people must have two crowning characteristics, I think: patience which is born of love.....and firmness. Jesus Christ never lowered His standards for Peter, but He was patient with him every time he fell short. Read for yourself how time and again he disappointed Jesus Christ, but Jesus Christ never gave up on Peter. He was always willing to wait and take another look at him.

I wish I would have had my pad and pencil in hand when I watched "All In The Family" last night.....there was that quick line that came from Edith's lips -- maybe you missed it, maybe you remember it -- when she said something about, there does come a time in the lives of many people who are married when it seems as though they might be falling out of love with each other. And then, bless her soul, she came in with that little bit of a gem, "But if only they'd wait long enough to take another look." ....So Jesus Christ was patient enough to give Peter another look.

Somebody once said to Michaelangelo, "What are you doing?" What an awful

QUESTION TO ASK A GENIUS!.....as he stood there before that stone with chisel-and-hammer in hand. Michaelangelo answered superbly, "I'm trying to release the angel that's imprisoned in this block of stone."

I shall no longer be of any value to you, my friend, I shall no longer be worthy of the name 'Pastor' when I no longer believe this. Now happy are you if you have evidence to prove that human nature can be changed for the better -- blessed indeed are you.

...but if you want to come and build a case and say, "but it's very discouraging." I'd have to say to you, by the grace of God, 'But don't give up hope', for I shudder to think what the alternative would mean.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Lent March 10, 1974

"A MAN NAMED ANDREW"

John 1:42

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There are some of us who don't get excited at all about "streaking." And I suppose there are several reasons why we don't get excited about "streaking." One is, chances are about three-and-a-half-billion-to-one that it will catch on and become a way of life. Another is, there is the historical perspective, you see, and one could build a case and say there's nothing at all new about "streaking." It is as old as the human race, because you don't forget Adam, who went streaking here and there throughout the garden.

But I suppose as far as recorded history is concerned, the original streaker may have been Archimedes, who one day when he had made a great scientific discovery, ran out into the streets of the ancient Greek town of Syracuse, stark naked, shouting "Eureka! Eureka! I've found it! I've found it!" Now don't let the nude man keep you from appreciating the naked truth, for here was someone who had found something, something wonderful had happened to him, and he just couldn't keep quiet!

It isn't exactly that he was bereft of his senses that he ran out into the streets naked. I'd like to think that it was simply that he was completely overcome by the wonderful truth that he had discovered, that he gave no thought at all as to whether he was clad or unclad. The wonderful thing had laid hold upon him and he just couldn't keep it to himself. He had to tell somebody.

I don't know what to make of this, honestly I don't -- occasionally I ask people, "Has anything wonderful happened to you lately?" - - or, "Tell me the most wonderful thing that has ever happened to you?" - - and like as not I draw a blank. I do this frequently with the boys and girls in the Catechetical Class, or maybe as I sit with them at the table at Supertuesday when we have supper together - - - "Did anything wonderful happen to you today?" - - I really don't know what to make of it, because like as not I don't get much of an answer. Could it be that so many wonderful things are happening to us that we're not about to put them in the catagory above other categories and pick out one thing in particular and say, "This, now, is the most wonderful thing."

....Or maybe we have to reach a certain age in life before we begin to appreciate that there are wonderful things that are coming my way....

> ...I remember Carl Hall, the Boy Scout executive in my home town, who had been told that he had incurable cancer. But on a blustery day when he was walking down Pine Street, somebody said to him about how miserable the weather was, and he simply replied above the storm so that the person could hear, "Well, when your days are numbered, any day is a wonderful day, no matter what it's like."

So maybe one has to reach a certain condition or circumstance in life before he discovers that even the gift of a brand new day is in itself a wonderful thing.

And I don't know for some people how long they have to be married until they may discover that from a human point of view the most wonderful thing that ever happened to them is that they did marry the person that they did. Has anything wonderful happened to you lately? Well I'll tell you one thing, when it does happen, you won't keep quiet about it.

It's the nature of these wonderful things that happen to us that compel us to make it known to other people.

In the small college that I attended back in depression years, of necessity the Registrar and the Secretary to the Dean of the Arts and Sciences Department shared the same small room as an office. The Registrar was considerably older than the secretary to the Dean, but one day the younger was startled when she was handed a 3x5 index card which simply read, as it was typed by the Registrar, the older of the two --

> Last night the Latin professor proposed to me - - I've got to tell somebody!

...well that was her way of passing it on -- "Eureka! Eureka! Eureka!" ...not rushing out on the college campus, but at least she couldn't allow another second to pass. Maybe she just didn't know how to say it, but say it she must! And say it she did! Again I say to you, it's the nature of the situation that when the wonderful thing does happen, the person to whom it happens just can't keep quiet.

Now all of this leads me to announce the text for today's sermon. Today's sermon deals with another character among the men made by the Master. If it's a subtitle you want, it's a series of sermons being preached on "The Master And His Men." Today it's "A Man Named Andrew" - - and this is the text, from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, the 42nd verse:

> "One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him . . "
> (I suppose he could say at this point "Eureka")
> " . .'We have found him'(meaning the Messiah) and he brought him to Jesus . . . "

Now you're not forgetting last Sunday morning's sermon, are you? Last Sunday we talked about a man named Peter, the best-known of all the disciples, I dare say. Well now today I want to talk to you about one of the less-known disciples, Andrew. What do you know about him?

Chances are you don't know very much. And maybe the reading of the text simply refreshed your memory and you do recall, oh yes, Andrew, he was Simon Peter's brother. And that's about all that some people know about him -- completely overshadowed by his brother.

Now before anything else is said in this sermon, let me bring to your attention that this happens quite frequently, that there are people who are overshadowed by their relatives.....

-- the father may be overshadowed by his son, or vice versa

-- a business associate may be overshadowed by his superior

-- a wife may be overshadowed by her husband, or vice versa.....

This happens quite frequently -- the overshadowed one may eventually discover that he has a personality complex. There are people who pay perfectly good money to to to a psychiatrist and lie on his couch and lament the fact that they are overshadowed. Life has done something to them because no matter where they go they are always identified by their relationship with someone who is more prominent than they, and this gives them eventually an inferiority complex, because they'd like very much to be able to stand on their own. They become very impressed with the fact that they're always being referred to by virtue of their relationship to this more prominent person. I dare say no matter where Andrew went, he was always referred to as "Simon Peter's brother."

But I am happy to report to you, it didn't give him an inferiority complex. He found his own niche. Sure, ever so often Jesus Christ would look around for the twelve disciples and then He'd nod to Peter, He'd give a favorable glance to James, likewise a favorable glance to John....but not to Andrew. Andrew never made it big, as far as they were concerned. He was never part of the Big Team, the Big Trio. As long as men will read Scripture and think of the twelve disciples, they'll always talk about Peter...James...and John. Andrew was never counted in, even as John was counted in at the foot of the cross, when the recorder makes note of the fact that there was one disciple who was there, and even referred to him as the 'beloved disciple.' Andrew never got that kind of press....he never got that kind of recognition. Poor Andrew, if you please, again and ever so often simply referred to as "Simon Peter's brother." What a distinction!

Andrew was content in life to be the introducer. He's the man who introduced the one who made the big time -- and that's no small thing in itself! And from that time on I dare say he was content to be recognized as the introducer, because that was his lot in life.

If you want to read about him in the Gospel record, you'll discover that altogether on three different occasions he was the introducer . . .

> ...having been impressed by Jesus Christ himself, he couldn't keep Jesus Christ to himself, so he ran home and found his brother and said, "Come on, Simon Peter, you've got to meet him for yourself -- you've simply got to see!"

Now I can't tell you whether Simon Peter was reluctant or not, but I do know that the Scriptures put it this way: "He brought him . . " -- he accompanied him -- he walked by his side -- he made sure that he got there.

> ...he was also the introducer of the little boy who on that

very remarkable occasion when our Blessed Lord had an emergency situation on His hands, -- five thousand people -- moved by compassion, they ought to be fed. You haven't forgotten, have you, what triggered the performance of that miracle? It was Andrew, whose eye happened to fall on the little boy with the lunch, and he took the little boy and he brought him to Jesus, and he introduced the youngster. And out of that little there came a lot! And that's no small thing, either....

...then you can also read for yourself in Scripture how one time a group of Greeks had heard about Jesus Christ, His reputation had preceded Him. They wanted to make His acquaintance -- in fact Scripture puts it this way: "We would see Jesus." And what did Andrew do? Andrew introduced them.....and that's no small thing, to introduce somebody to Jesus Christ!

Now there are several observations I'd like to make on the basis of all this, if you don't mind. One is this: you should have discovered this already - - that Andrew is the patron saint of all those who become chairman-of-a-committee-of-one. He didn't wait for anybody else to give him a directive....he didn't wait to see if anybody else was going to go into action... ...he didn't wait for a resolution to be drafted....he didn't wait for a committee to be organized. He only knew one thing -- something wonderful had happened to him, and he got into motion <u>immediately.</u>

Now I'm not speaking disparagingly of resolutions, and I'm not downgrading the necessity for committees, but I am singing the praise of people who <u>act</u> -- <u>at once.</u> When they see a need that has to be met. I said this at

8:30, and I think I can say it to you now....and if time permits I think I'll say it at 11:15 - - - if I were free to leave this sacred desk at this moment and walk down here, the aisle of this church, I could spend a good hour standing alongside of this person and standing alongside of that person, and without embarrassment identifying this person or that person who has released untold good in Saint Luke Church and in this community by being a kind of Andrew, who's gone about doing something good because he or she happened to see the need, and didn't wait for a committee to get organized, to draw up a set of rules and regulations by which to operate.

The longer I am associated with this parish the more I am absolutely overwhelmed by the amount of good that's being unleashed in and through this parish by individuals who constitute a kind of committee-of-one.

Now the second thing that needs to be said, and perhaps more important than anything else, - - the object of Andrew's concern was always to bring a person into relationship with Jesus Christ. He brought his brother -- to Christ. He brought the little boy -- to Christ. He brought the Greeks -- to Christ. I don't think Andrew tried to convince them on his own. He was perfectly content to let Jesus Christ speak for Himself. But he did feel in duty bound to bring about the exposure to Jesus Christ.

Now I have to ask you, as naturally I would, why do you suppose so many of us fall so short in doing something so simple as all that? I think you and I might be shocked if we were to realize the number of people who live and die without anyone ever making the attempt to introduce them to Jesus Christ. And I dare say we might be equally shocked at the number of church people who will live and die without ever really introducing somebody else to Jesus Christ. And without any hesitation I dare say to you I've lived long enough to know -- how it may be with you I don't know -- but for myself,

the most wonderful thing that's ever happened to me is the realization that Jesus Christ cares, and saves, and has an abiding concern for my soul. And all of that has been made possible because there have been those who have made it their business in life to introduce me to Christ. ...and again and ever so often to re-introduce me to Christ.

When something wonderful happens to you, you can't keep quiet -- you may shout it -- you may write it on 3x5 index cards -- you may express it by a spring in your step, a whistle from your lips, a change in your attitude - - a transformation of your personality.....when something wonderful happens, it's bound to show.

Maybe that's where this sermon ought to zero in by way of conclusion - - - maybe all too many of us have yet to discover what a wonderful thing it really is to have been found by Jesus Christ. And I dare you to do more than a casual bit of thinking about something as profound as all that!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Lent — March 17, 1974

"A MAN NAMED JOHN"

John 19:26

WE REALLY don't have to tell you, O God, what You already know: seemingly we make so little time for this sort of thing, to set aside a period when we'll give You some measure of undivided attention. We'd like to think it could happen now, and so we look to Your Holy Spirit to help us in that direction. Amen.

Let me remind you at once of the kind of thing we're seeking to do these Sunday mornings during Lent, to take a close look at some of the twelve disciples - - like a camera with its lens that zooms in on one particular person, so that his face can be seen more closely against the background of all the others. We began two weeks ago with the discussion of that man Simon Peter, perhaps the best-known of all the disciple band. And then the last Lord's Day we talked about the man who happened to have introduced him to the Master, a man who is one of the lesser lights among the twelve, a man named Andrew. And now this morning we come to a man named John, of whom it's been said, "He is the disciple Jesus loved."

Let me read the text for you, it's the 26th verse of the 19th chapter of the Gospel that bears his name:

> "Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by his side."

As long as man has memory certain associations will invariably be made. Mention a name, and in all likelihood some specific relationship will come to mind. . . . .

...what student of history can think of Napoleon without thinking of Waterloo?

...what student of history can think of Harry Truman without thinking of the decision to drop the terrible bomb? Or perhaps when you think of certain people by name, another appelative comes quickly to mind - - the name does stick.....

...as long as there are students of history it will be:

--Abraham Lincoln....."Honest Abe"

--Alfred E. Smith....."The Happy Warrior"

-- Calvin Coolidge....."Silent Cal"

-- John....."Beloved Disciple"

...the name sticks.

And if I read you aright, my friend, you'd be very happy if I could re-write the Bible, because there's something about that appellation that irritates you and rubs you the wrong way. You're not about to settle for the fact that there could be one out of twelve of whom it could be said that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved. For the implication, you see, is so terribly apparent, as though John had a place of preferment that the others cannot have. You and I cannot picture Jesus Christ with so great favoritism.

It should be a very easy thing for me to say to myself, well we only have five Sundays to do this thing during Lent this year, and when I choose the five out of the twelve disciples to whom I will refer Sunday after Sunday, I'll just skip John, and nobody will know the difference....saying to myself, that's a difficult text -- how can I justify to a congregation that comes together on a Sunday morning that John was the disciple whom Jesus loved.....it would have been a very easy thing for me to have passed him by.

But the text happens to read exactly as it does. And I'm not alone in responding to it as I've just indicated to you just now -- others have res-

ponded in the same way, and this is what they've done.....

- - some students of the Bible have said, well don't get too uptight about that because John didn't write the Gospel that bears his name. He simply gathered the material together and after he was gone somebody else came on the scene and put the material as a matter of record, and knowing John as they did, they were the ones who wrote into the record that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved.. ...settle for that -- don't get disturbed -- somebody else referred to John in this way, not John himself.

- - then there are those who say, difficult as the text is, look at it this way: John simply refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" - - but he doesn't say that Jesus loved him more than He loved the others! He was just tremendously overcome with the fact that he was the object of the love of Christ - - that of all the people on the face of the earth, one day Jesus Christ pointed His finger at him and said, "You're my man"...and from that time on he walked and he lived in the sunshine of the love of the Carpenter's Son. And he could never get over it -- "Jesus loves me! - - Jesus loves me! - - Jesus loves me! "....and so he writes it into the Gospel that bears his name: "I, a disciple whom Jesus loved - - "

...Andrew, if he wrote a book, could have done the same thing presumably.....Simon Peter could have done the same thing - - "I, of all the people on the face of the earth, happen to have been the person included among those whom

Jesus loved -- I was loved by Jesus Christ!"

Well, I'm not about to settle for either one of these notions, or both of them. And I can't shy away from the responsibility that rests upon me as a proclaimer of God's truth, to walk away from the sacred desk at this point and say, "That's it! -- do with it what you will." For as I read this Gospel that bears the name of John I find repeated reference to the fact that he seems to have been in the place of preferment. Several times the same reference is made: "the disciple whom Jesus loved".....and it's in this record, mark you, that in the night in which our Lord was betrayed, in the dark night of the soul of Jesus Christ - - who among the twelve does He want to be nearest Him? - - - a man named John. And you and I are human enough to know that when we walk into the deep dark night of the soul, only those whom we happen to love most, from a human perspective, are those that we'd like to have nearest us.

Now if you can do anything else with that thought, you go ahead, but I can't ignore this implication. The record says, "He leaned upon the breast of Jesus" - - - this man named John --- and if that isn't a position of preferment I don't know what is!

And then it's also a matter of record that in His dying moments He looks down from the cross and sees there -- not Andrew -- not Simon -- surely not Judas! -- not Nathanael -- not James.....but a man named John. And the Bible says, as He looked down He said to Mary, His mother, to this man named John -- "Woman, behold your son - - - son, behold your mother" - - - as much as to say to John (if you want a free and reckless translation or interpretation of this text), Jesus is saying to John in this moment: "John, from now on you take my place!" Now you just don't speak words like that to <u>anyone.</u> Such words are reserved only to those who, for want of a better expression,

happen to have a position of preferment. So there you have it! The name sticks -- John, the-Disciple-Whom-Jesus-Loved.

But hear me and hear me well, my friend. I'm not about to say that Jesus Christ loved him more than He loved the others. He loved all of them equally. But this is simply the way of having the record tell us that John responded to that love in a way that the others did not. And that is a truth of life that you and I do well to recognize, that there are some people who have a sensitivity that others do not have.

To what length do I have to go to prove this point for you? We have in this congregation a woman who is one of eleven children, who grew up in the state of Texas, and in conversation with her I have learned that they were all different, as any set of parents probably would attest to that fact. And I suppose if her mother were to speak to us she could recall for us how on different occasions there might have been one or two of those children who responded to her as the other children might not have responded...and not that she loved them more than she loved the others. If you only have two children in your household - - - it could be that you understand what's meant when people say that youngsters can be as different as day is different from night even when you only have two!

How much more do I have to go -- to what length must I go to impress this truth upon you? There was the Dean of Education in a leading university who was training the teachers of the future, and as he had them together one day he said, "Now when you go out to teach, when the day's work is over, happy is that teacher among you who will look back over the day's work and recall the face of at least one responsive pupil!" Now the material was prepared for all of the youngsters in front of the teacher that day. Chances are there's always this pupil or that pupil who responds as the others do not

respond. And it's in this category that I put John, the beloved disciple.

My understanding of this text is not that Jesus loved him more than the others but that John had a way of responding to the love of Christ in a way that the others did not respond. Now if you were to press me and say, why was this? I don't know. I only know that it's a fact of life, that there are people who may fall into that kind of a characterization.

Now let's take a look at John again. For one thing, I am willing to admit that perhaps of all the disciples he fell into the category of those who were younger than the rest. I don't know the ages of the disciples, but I think I am correct in telling you that he was among the younger, and being younger he had a measure of enthusiasm that perhaps some of the others didn't have. He most certainly had an early dedication -- he wasn't an old man who made a decision for Christ.....he was a younger man. And there's something brilliant about that.

And then I also think that when he came to Jesus Christ, he was the kind of person who always came with a readiness to believe. It's a thrilling thing for those of us who have to chair meetings to discover around the conference table those who come in with a readiness to respond, as positively as possible. It saves a lot of time, you see. When the orientation is already there, when the attitude has been set.....a readiness to respond.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not short-changing for a single moment the man whose nature and characteristics are such that he has to question everything. Oh, I'm willing to believe as the man once said, that there will be more faith in honest doubt than half the creeds profess -- this I can understand too. But I also know that Jesus Christ only had three years -- three short years -- to work with these men, to mold them, to make them ready to carry on after He was gone. And every hour was precious. And to think that

every time, if I may put it for you in this way, He sat down with John, there was this readiness to move on to the next thing, and the next thing, and the next thing. And always somehow to sense the direction in which the Master was moving.

> ...but with Peter? -- how often our Blessed Lord had to take time to cut him down to size! -- to clip his wings! ...only God knows how much time Jesus Christ had to spend with Thomas, with all of his doubts -- constantly trying to shore him up and build him up all over again. Not that our Blessed Lord was unwilling to do it, but it took time!

...but with John -- how refreshing! -- to know that the sensitivity was there, and the responsiveness.

I think this was why he has the label sticking to him, for want of any better way of putting it -- the-disciple-whom-Jesus-loved.....I much prefer to say, the-disciple-who-most-responded-to-the-love-of-the-Master.

Now, why in the world do I preach this sermon to you? For a very practical reason, my friend. Every single one of us is caught up in a relationship with other people, and it could well be that by this time you may have been passed by on a half-dozen different occasions, when somebody else got the nod, somebody else got the approving glance, and you didn't. It gives cause for envy, it gives cause for hostility. Occasionally when I counsel with people it's my difficult assignment to say to them, well, I know what your problem is, and at the risk of alienating you I'll tell you what it is -- your pride has been hurt. To the everlasting credit of Andrew, Simon Peter and all the other disciples, they wouldn't come to Jesus Christ and say, "We've had it -- we're sick and tired of the fact that ever so frequently you look to John as you don't look to the rest of us. We've had it, Master! --

- - we'd like to get out of it! We can't take it any longer. Wherever you seem to go, John's by your side! You seem to enjoy his company, you seem to seek his counsel - - ".....we have no record that any of the twelve came, not even Judas, and said, "Jesus, we've had it!"

Now let me say to you as I say to myself, any number of us, I suppose, have been passed by when others got the approving nod. Well if you're just as qualified as they, don't nurse your wounds. It's just happened that that's the way the cookie crumbles. And as over against that, maybe they did have a certain compatability that you and I do not have. And don't fault the person who made the selection. Just know that you and I have a day's work to do where we happen to be, and no day's work honestly done ever goes unrewarded. This I most certainly believe.

And the second practical reason why I share this sermon with you is this: that if you should be the fortunate one, so fortunate that you have these beatific qualities, that from the very beginning you have this sensitivity that others may not have - - - for God's sake, cherish it! Don't ever abuse it, don't ever exploit it - - don't ever allow yourself to have an aura of self-righteousness. Look upon it as a gift and hand it over to the gracious hand of God, to use it to His glory. And by the same token, so guard it that no one else can exploit it.

I think I would have liked John. I wouldn't want to live in a world where there wouldn't be that kind of a person who could respond as I may not be able to respond. For what joy it must bring then to the Master, and He, too, is entitled to having His heart gladdened.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 24, 1974

"A MAN NAMED MATTHEW"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There is always the possibility that tomorrow could be extraordinary -- somewhat different from any other day that we've ever lived. Experience may prove this for you already. Look back over the days of your years, and is it not true that there are certain days that are distinctive -- certain days somewhat different from any other day that might have preceded it? Whatever your age may be, my friend, this is most certainly true.

As an example, whether you're aware of it or not - -

-- that day was different for your father, for your mother, when you spoke your first word, when you took your first step.....

-- that day was different than any other day when you enrolled in kindergarten, when you went off to be a first-grader....

-- that day was different from any other day when perhaps you formally completed your college education, graduate school experience.....

-- that day was different when you got your first job.....

-- that day was different when your superior called you in and told you that that dreamed-for promotion would be a reality within a matter of two weeks - - that day was different.....

-- that day was different when there was no question about it -- you met her, and your life has never again been the same.....

-- that day was different....when the angel of death hovered over your home and broke your family circle for the first time and took a loved one into God's nearer presence.....

Whatever the nature, the character, there's always the possibility that tomorrow could be a different day. Brand it, if you will, a day of destiny.

I want to talk to you this morning about a man named Matthew, who looked back and remembered a particular day in his life that was vastly different from any other day. You'll get the rationale and the justification for this thought when I read the text for you. It's from a book that bears his name, it's the 9th chapter, and this is the way he put it down quite objectively:

> "And as Jesus passed forth he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the seat of custom. And he said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him."

What a playwright couldn't do with a couple of actors like that! Think of the tremendous impact that could be made by two men on a stage, portraying for us the encounter that took place that day, a day that was so different in the life of a tax collector -- -

> " . . and Jesus came and said, follow me,
> and he arose, and followed him . . . "

Come now, honestly, do you think it really happened just like that? Well before we answer that question let's take a good look at each of these characters separately, and then after that we'll put them together in the frame and turn the sound track on, that we might hear again the quality of those dynamic words, only two in number.....

...well first there's this carpenter's-apprentice-turned-preacher. He was getting around quite a bit these days. Wherever he went he seemed

to have spent his time preaching....talking with people....forever introducing the God-factor. Oh, every now and then He performed a wonder-work (we call them miracles)....and like as not in between he'd find some chap and say to him, "I could use you"....and the net result was that by this time a handful of men were following Him, no matter where He went. They found Him quite irresistable -- they just had to be in His company. So they spent their time with Him, looking, listening, learning.....well, that's the carpenter-s-son-turned-preacher, of whom it had been said that whenever He really got involved in another man's life, and that man was at all sensitive or responsive, a change began to set in. He brought a transforming touch. Now you have His picture, don't you?

Now focus on the other chap. I have to tell you some unpleasant things about him.....

...he was a social outcast. His fellow Jews despised him. He wasn't allowed to be enrolled as a member of the synagogue -- I have to tell youthis - - the courts would not allow him to be a witness. They branded him as a man whose word was not to be trusted. By profession he was a money-gatherer -- he collected taxes for imperial Rome.

...now I've already told you how these tax collectors got their jobs. There was a time when they were auctioned off to the highest bidder...

...Rome would give the job to any man who was willing to say, "I'll take it under these conditions" . . . and one condition was, Rome would say to this man, "We expect so much revenue from your district -- now how you get it"(can you imagine this!)"- - how you get it is none of our business. You can bleed your people as much as you may see fit. . " (maybe they didn't talk like that, but that's the way you read between

the lines) . . . "but we do expect you to return to the Imperial Treasury of Rome so much revenue from your district . . . "

..Well you can imagine the variety of abuses that set in as the tax collector began to bleed his people, charging whatever the traffic would carry.

Well the abuses were so bad that by the time of Jesus they made some correction, and some reform was established. But nonetheless he was a tax collector, a publican, a man in the employment of the government, who dealt with public monies.

There were all kinds of taxes. Last night I was impressed -- one of the first two pictures to be shown on the screen by Mrs. Marie Einspruch in that very important Mission Study here in Bieber Hall was a scene of Capernaum....and as she narrated the pictures she said that Capernaum was a very important town....it was on a very important travel route....it was the home of Matthew, the tax collector.

Well now there he was, picture him, right there in that important location. It seemed as though anything and everything was taxed -- anything that passed through his town had a levy applied to it. If a cart came through, he had to count the number of wheels and tax the cart according to its wheels and the size of the axle. When they went into the market-place, there was always a tax on what was purchased and what was sold. And for the people who had an income, he had to decide how much he would levy against their earnings. When they traveled the road through Capernaum, there was a toll that had to be paid - - - no matter where they turned around, there was the outstretched palm of Levi . . . . they hated him.

They hated him for two reasons. First, for the way he bled them. And secondly because a devout Jew permitted himself to believe that only God was their king, and they weren't about to fill the treasury of an

earthly ruler, and to fill it by way of their own fellow-countryman, a tax collector.

Why do I make so much of this? For the simple reason that this was a day that was different in this man's life. And of all the people who might have been considered as a likely candidate to follow the Master of Men, you, I dare say, would not have chosen this tax collector. But Jesus did. He had a way of seeing the potential that lies underneath the surface. Now these dramatic words: "Follow me."....Matthew simply records for us that he arose and followed Him.

But do you really think it happened like that? Whatever else you think of Jesus Christ, don't ever for a moment allow yourself to believe that He mesmerized people. I'm inclined to think that somewhere along the line Matthew had heard about Jesus Christ, somebody had spoken a favorable word - - - you won't forget that, will you? There are people who make some kind of a judgment regarding Jesus Christ by the favorable way other people speak about Him. And he may have heard about Jesus Christ before he actually heard Him for himself.

But then let's suppose there was that day when he heard Jesus preach. There was something about not only the way He said it but what He had to say himself that made a dent on his mind. He stood for so much integrity, He stood for so much manhood....and He was forever -- don't you ever forget it -- introducing the God-factor! -- the eternal dimension -- the thing that we'd have to deal with the day after tomorrow, and fifty years beyond that.

Now I like to think that all of this had happened before and I'd like to think that day by day when Matthew came back to this seat of custom, there was an increasing disdain for his day's work - - - "Where is it getting me, anyway?" He began to hate the fact that he was being hated. And perhaps he was discovering as he hadn't thought of it before, that there's

more in life than fingering money....collecting it....gathering it..... stealing it.....becoming a part of a bribe. Day by day he became increasingly disillusioned with the kind of thing that was claiming his energy hour after hour.....and then this day - -

> - - there's always the possibility of the extraordinary day...Jesus Christ loomed upon the horizon and looked at him. And Matthew says, "He simply said to me, "Follow me'" - - Matthew simply says, "I arose and followed Him."

But do you think, honestly now -- do you think he hesitated a bit? Do you think Jesus Christ had to stand there and say, "Well make up your mind, man -- it's today that the decision ought to be made!" Do you suppose Matthew sat down and tried to say to himself, What's going to happen to all the obligations that I've incurred?....what's going to happen if I have to reduce my standard of living?....what's going to happen to me?

...I don't know what went throuth his mind. I only know that Matthew had to record it this way, that the net result was that he found in this man from Nazareth an attraction that drew him, magnet-like, toward something better than what he had. This I most certainly believe.

This I most certainly believe, that sooner or later God through Jesus Christ looms upon the horizon of your life. I'm spending my years as a minister of the Gospel proclaiming this sort of thing. Let me put it for you this way, that eventually you're on the calling list of Jesus Christ. When He comes your way, He'll be inviting you to the plateau, to a hill, to some segment of life that's going to be finer and better than anything you have ever known before.

Now if you were to press me and say to follow Jesus Christ means you're going to go somewhere.....where? I don't know. Quite parenthetically now,

some day we will have to sit down and write all the new phrases and terminology that's come into the life of this congregation since we've developed a comprehensive Youth Ministry. It would be a good exercise! You know, each time we have a Summer Staff, they go searching for some slogan, some expression that's going to characterize their emphases. Well one summer they had two words -- FOLLOW ME -- and cleverly enough they emblazoned these words on sweat-shirts that they wore around in their activities here or walked the streets of Silver Spring. And one of our cute numbers was walking down the streets of Silver Spring with these words emblazoned behind her: FOLLOW ME ....and some character came up and said, "Where are you going, girlie?" -- a perfectly good question. But in all honesty, I'll have to tell you this, when Jesus Christ asks you to follow Him, I can't give you a blueprint, I can't give you a map, and say this is your personal program, this is where He is going to take you - - - I can only tell you where He's taken me. And as the Pastor of this congregation I try to understand how He may lead people differently, into ways that perhaps may not be my cup of tea!

But the important thing may not be, where will He lead you? The important think is <u>whom</u> will you allow to lead you? That's the acid test -- whom do you really follow in life? Who is your master? Alvin Rogness, bless his soul, once wrote about people who were caught up in this extraordinary day when the time of decision had arrived, and he said that they allowed themselves to believe that they can walk a thin line, and band themselves between God and Satan, between good and evil. It can't be done! He also tells about people sometimes, tourist-like, who want to know a measure of satisfaction in saying that they have been in this country and they have been in that country, if only to spend two hours in it -- and then they go back and go somewhere else -- they do that sometimes up in Canada,

people who go to Niagara Falls, you know, they want to be on both sides of the border, but they're not really making the decision. And so perhaps they decide to live either in Canada or in the United States -- explore its territory, put down their roots, establish their homes and raise their families and allow themselves to come under the laws of the land. By the same token, as far as Jesus Christ is concerned, it's risky business to allow yourself to think that you can take a sortie of this kingdom and a sortie into that kingdom -- in and out -- at your leisure, because as soon as you put foot down on a particular territory you are subject to the laws of that land. I warn you, my friend, as soon as you give a favorable glance to Jesus Christ, expect to be covered by His laws, by the power of His personality.

I don't tell you the whole story when I say I don't know where He may lead you -- by that I meant I don't know where He's going to lead you on this side of the Great Gate. But I can tell you, if you follow Him, what your destination will be. If I were a painter depicting Heaven, I think I would have somebody standing there at the portal and asking a question -- how did you get here? Then I'd give the title: "I Followed Someone Worth Following."

Now I'd like to say you're fortunate if you'll recognize the hymn tune that I've asked Mr. Clawson to play at this point, the tune of an old Gospel hymn. Maybe these words will come to your mind:

> "I can hear my Saviour calling, I can hear my Saviour calling,
> I can hear my Saviour calling, "Take my cross and follow me."
>
> I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go with Him through
> the garden, I'll go with Him through the garden, I'll go
> with Him all the way.
>
> I'll go with Him through the Judgment, And He'll give me
> grace and glory; where He leads me I will follow,
> I'll go with Him all the way . . . "

I dare you to try it. Those who have look back to us from where they are and say - - "It's worth it!"

....this I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday in Lent - Passion Sunday March 31, 1974

" A MAN NAMED JUDAS"

THROUGH Jesus Christ Thy Son
our Lord. Amen.

I dare say there are few passages in Scripture that sadden the heart of the devout believer as much as the passage that I am about to read for you now, a passage of Scripture that serves as the necessary background for all that follows. It is recorded as the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

> "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, procuring a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them . . . "

These Sunday mornings during Lent we've given to a consideration of "The Master and His Men" - - and I suppose the title for the series could well have been: "The Men Whom The Master Made" and you and I have known a measure of satisfaction in knowing how He took presumably a nobody and made a somebody out of him. That's always possible with the transforming touch of the Master-of-Men.

But I suppose psychologically I've heard you shouting from the depth of your hearts as I read this passage of Scripture for you, if you have any sensitivity at all, in unbelief you've said, "Oh no — it cannot be!" But it did

happen.

He had twelve disciples - - He chose them individually, and personally. Of all the chapters that have ever been written, this is as thrilling as any, that God-Come-To-Us-In-The-Form-Of-Jesus-Christ should see fit to choose this man and that man to be with Him, and they should know the intimacy of His fellowship, that they might walk closely with Him and draw all the benefit that such a relationship should give.

We're thrilled when we realize what He was able to do with Peter, what He was able to do with Andrew, what He was able to do with John, what He was able to do with Matthew. And now I suppose the sub-title for today's sermon would have to be: "Judas -- A Man The Master Could Not Make."

Go ahead - - - ask me that one-worded question: ###?

I don't know. Oh, I have some ideas on the subject. And if I can be helpful at all, let me tell you some of the notions that have been advanced by other people, as I recall what I have read for a number of years . . .

- - there's a school of thought that maintains that Judas did what he did because he was impatient. It wasn't that he didn't believe in his Master, but he believed so well in his Master that he felt it was high time now that the Master got with it. This was no longer the year of popularity -- this was the time of opposition. And this school of thought maintains that Judas honestly believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that if He had to be cornered, then He'd declare His Messiah-ship, there'd be no question about it. So Judas, being the impatient one, precipitates a crisis, makes a situation. This would be it! Remember now, I said, "because he was impatient" -- he couldn't afford to wait as God allowed the situation to mature . . .

- - there are other people who say that Judas did what he did because he was avaricious. The wood carving that we have in the altar -- the boys and girls in the Catechetical Class easily, when I ask them to identify the disciples, find out who Judas is because he's clenching the money-bag. There are those who maintain because he dealt with money he became avaricious, he ran that risk more than any of the others. And then somewhere, somehow the diabolical scheme developed so that he could put his hand on 30 pieces of silver . . . one doesn't ask how he makes the money, it's simply that the money is to be had. Well, that's a notion that's been advanced . . .

- - then there's another notion that's been advanced -- Judas didn't come from the same section of the country as the others did. From the very beginning he considered himself an outsider -- never fully accepted. He allowed himself to be cursed by the notion that he never fully became one of the disciple band. Now closely related to that is this suggestion: that Judas never allowed himself to think that he quite made the disciple group. And the reason for that is this, they say. There was an inner circle - - - you read it for yourself, I've referred to it for you repeatedly: 'And then Jesus took with him Peter, James and John . . . ' Now get this closely, you who are sensitive -- there's a school of thought that maintains that Judas just couldn't hack it!

. . that time after time it seemed as though Jesus gave the nod to Peter, James and John . . . but never once turned in Judas' direction -- tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Judas,

after the meeting is over, if you and I could just sit down, there are some things I'd like to talk about -- I'd welcome your advice and counsel -- I'd like to tell, like you to tell me how you feel about it, Judas." But suppose we accept the notion that this never happendd to Judas, and he had to suffer and endure the fact that again and again and ever so often it was "Peter - James - and John" who got the nod, and never Judas. He was sensitive, and he allowed himself to be that self-centered that he never quite got over it. And eventually the thing began to fester....and who knows when a thing begins to fester when and how it might burst. . .

Well there you have it, my friend. You pay your money and you take your choice. For myself, I don't mind telling you with this naive mind of mine, I settle for the fact that he allowed the Devil to get inside of him. And whatever may have been the nature and the character of the sin, it was that he would allow the Devil to have the ascendency.

Well, after you've tried to answer the question Why?, is that all that can be said? Of course not. What do you make of it?

Well with all the strength that I can command, I think there are lessons to be learned from Judas:

One - - name any sin that appeals to you -- and by that I mean name any sin that you think might have been the sin that prompted Judas to do what he did -- impatience

-- avarice

-- self-centeredness

-- hurt ego

...name any sin, and this is what I will tell you: that you cannot afford to take any sin lightly! Because any sin can eventually lead to betrayal, and

self-destruction. One of the terrible things that has to be said about our generation is that we've lost our sense of sin, and not very many of us take sin seriously. With all the strength that I can command I say to you that no sin should ever be taken lightly. This is Lesson One that comes to me out of the life of Judas.

The second lesson is this: I honestly believe that somewhere along the line Judas may have become aware that he was less of a disciple than he should have been. Whatever may have been his weakness, I think he had his moments when he was absolutely aware of it. I think we're made that way! I don't think that we are totally blind to our weaknesses.

Now this is what I am about to suggest - - - how different it might have been if only on occasion, whatever it might have been, he would have gone to Jesus and said, "Jesus, I have a problem, and I don't know what to do with it. I'm never quite on top of it! I can't handle it by myself."

> ...now if I am speaking to your condition, my friend, I mean to speak to your condition because some of us go on beset by our sins because we're too proud to admit them or to seek help.

I suggest to you that the story of Judas might have been different if he would have sought out his Master and said, "Master, help me!" . . . because I honestly believe that on occasion even Jesus Christ intimated to Judas, as was so definitely pronounced on that last night, that there was the sin of betrayal within him.

What else is a lesson that I think we can learn from Judas? I hesitate to tell you because I don't want you to exploit it. I know human nature. The other lesson is this, that even Jesus Christ couldn't win them all. Now that may trigger within you the notion that you at once can start writing off some people, and brand them a bad apple and irretrievably bent for Hell, and from that point on you can excuse yourself. But I have news for you, my

friend - - Jesus, knowing what Judas was, never wrote him off the books, and treated him with the same measure of love that He gave every single one of the other disciples.

I'm always caught up short when I think of what happened on Maundy Thursday, the very night He was betrayed - - the words of Institution for the Sacrament: "Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night in which he was betrayed took bread, and blessed it, and gave it to them . . . " With the betrayal close at hand He never treated any of them with less than love, and most certainly not Judas.

Now there's one final word, if you don't mind. It's only a speculation, but the truth inherent in the speculation cannot be ignored. An artist once decided to paint an interpretation of the twelve disciples. He looked far and wide for one who showed the face of innocence and devotion. That was to be his John, the beloved disciple....

...for understandable reasons he chose to paint Judas last, and he waited and waited until he could find someone whose visual features best represented for him what Judas might have been. And when he found that character he painted Judas.....and according to the story, all the time he was painting the face of Judas he was haunted by something. There was something about that man that he had seen before.

Now maybe you've come to the conclusion -- the story ends in this manner: the man who sits for Judas had some time earlier sat for John. Which is simply to say there is always the possibility that we could fall from grace. And that's something to think about. But I'm happy to tell you in a very positive way, it doesn't have to happen.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shahoian
Easter Day April 14, 1974

BECAUSE OF what did happen on this day that we celebrate, I can now say unto you: Grace, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.

The brother of our Assistant Pastor once sent me a cartoon. The cartoon, as he thought, would appeal to his father, was the description of a church bulletin board, and on the church bulletin board these words were to be found:

"A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE YOU:
THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

And underneath the cartoon in his own hand had written: "What a great idea! - - too bad it never caught on"

One can say that sort of thing about the Resurrection truth. The word that was spoken in the Resurrection Garden was simply this:

"He is not here - - He's risen as He said . . . "

One of the strange things about the human race is simply that we don't always take to new ideas. I frankly confess to you for myself, when I first heard him say it a decade or so ago, that is, the voice of the young President, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, in a significant address that he made. A decade or so ago he said, "The man is now living who one day will put foot upon the surface of the moon." Not being privy to some of the information that some of you had because of your profession, or because of your scientific orientation, I did not find it an easy thing to believe. A great idea, of course -- 'twould be wonderful if it would catch on.

Then there was that lady across the shores, of whom I read the other day, who even though she saw it on the television screen -- man putting his foot

upon the surface of the moon for the first time -- refused to believe it. She simply said, "It was a concoction of the American government -- a clever propaganda trick, and to this very day they tell me she remains unconvinced. It's a fact, however, and a fact that has influenced the course of events.

By the same token I remind you now of the Resurrection Truth. There were those who refused to believe that it actually happened. There are those who, even though they might have the same kind of evidence that this woman across the shores had -- actual re-production of the event --

> ...or if we had first-hand the journalist who stood there to record the event, a tape recording of the voice of the angel, a tape recording of the voice even of our Blessed Lord....

....there would still be those who would say, "I do not believe it."

In one of the Gospel lessons that's chosen to be read on this day, there's a matter of record that there were those present then and there who were told, at the very beginning, this tremendous truth, and their response, it seemed to them like an idle tale. I'm not troubled nearly so much this morning by those who deliberately refused to believe as I am troubled by those who once believed, but do not live as though it were true.

Our sister Lutheran congregation at Thomas Circle, Luther Place Memorial Church, proudly lists, I am told, among its roster of former Pastors the name of Lloyd C. Douglas. There was a time in his life when he felt that God was calling him away from the pulpit, and that God meant for him to impress upon people truth by the written word. And so he became an author.

Among the novels that he wrote, readily there comes to your mind now

undoubtedly the novel entitled "The Robe." In "The Robe" there was a character named Marcellus, who had become a convert to the Christian faith. Quickly he goes to his fiancee Diana and he tells her about this wonderful thing that has happened to him. But Diana, not about to be persuaded, says to Marcellus, "But let's pretend that it never happened . . . let's go on as though it weren't true." You see, it simply wasn't for her, and Marcellus is supposed to have answered to her words of this type: "But, Diana, I can't go on as though it didn't happen. This thing now affects my whole life." It's a study of two people, the one who wills to believe, and the other who doesn't want to believe.

Poor Diana, you see, she was imprisoned by notions of the past, the idea of a God who wasn't big enough to do something as great as the Resurrection. She was far more comfortable with the old ideas . . . somewhat like the Australian aborigine who had a chance to get a brand new boomerang, but it never caught on with him because he never succeeded in throwing the old one away. So there are people like that in their Christian experience. They have old notions of God and they've never succeeded in having them, in having done with them. The notion of a God who could bring a man from the dead, the notion that love could be stronger than hate, that good could outlast evil! - - - a brand new notion.

The Christian church celebrates today the fact of the Resurrection. What is the meaning of the central truth of the Christian faith? -- Jesus Christ is alive! And what difference does this make to a man? How could it be that each of us could also be as Marcellus and say, "It affects my whole life"? Let me suggest to you at least two things.

One, the central truth of the Resurrection reminds us that life goes on.

The grave is not the end. Somebody once said to Robert Frost, "What has life taught you? - - What is the lesson of life?" And immediately Robert Frost replied: "The lesson of life is that life goes on!" Well that's a lesson of the Resurrection, but not the lesson. The second lesson is far more important. According to the Christian understanding of life, rooted and grounded in the Resurrection Truth, life goes on triumphantly, and life goes on according to God's terms.

An eighteen-year-old committed suicide and left a suicide note. The note read something like this:

> "I made a bargain with God. I told God that life wasn't turning out as I would like to have it turn out, and I gave him a year in which to do something about it, and if there would be no change, then I would end it all. Well, a year has come and gone, and God hasn't come through."

...the mistake that she made, of course, was that she was dictating to God the terms on which life was to be lived and it was to be lived according to her terms. And when man tries to dictate to God the terms upon which he wants to life, he winds up with strife, and envy, and hostility, and tension ....because he never quite gets over the hurdle of trying to see life lived on God's terms. Life was meant to go on, and the Resurrection says it's meant to go on on God's terms....gloriously.....triumphantly.

Now the text for this brief meditation -- the words of our Lord and Saviour. You will find them in the 14th chapter according to John:

"Because I live, you too shall live."

It's wonderful to have the deep questions of life answered to your satisfaction, honestly now. The question of the Old Testament is this question: If a man

dies, shall he live again? Job had some ideas as to the answer when he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives."

...but it wasn't until Jesus Christ came that Jesus Christ was able to say, "Because I live -- there shall be no question about it -- you, too, shall live -- not somehow, but triumphantly.

I've told some of you, several days ago I stood face to face with a member of this congregation who went half-way across the continent to be by the bedside of her dying mother. She said to me, "I want to say goodbye to my mother. She has terminal cancer - - I don't expect to see her again before she dies." But as I stood and talked with this parishioner, a fellow member of yours, it was made very plain to me that because of the Resurrection Truth this family has the assurance of Jesus Christ.....death is not the end! ....life goes on! But I say to you with all the strength that I can command, immediately now, you don't have to wait until the moment of death to be given this assurance. For the believer, right now he's caught up with the quality of life which is eternal, because of the way Jesus Christ lived, died, and lives eternally.

And that's the dimension, you see, that we need most -- it's the greatest single moral challenge that comes to us.

It's a great idea, my friend...."because I live, you, too, shall live -- not somehow, but triumphantly."

....I dare you to let it catch on!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday of Easter April 28, 1974

"TO BE USED BY GOD"

II Timothy 2:21

FOR A little while now, O God, in this place we'll try to give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. We'd like to make the most of it. And to that end we ask now that Your Holy Spirit may help us. Amen.

I've discovered that there's more than one useful purpose that I'm expected to serve when I sit at the family dinner table. For one thing, I'm expected either to offer Grace or to see that somebody else offers the table prayer. Then secondly, as a proper host, I should see that good conversation is engendered as we sit at the family table for dinner. Then I've discovered in recent years that there's a third useful purpose that I'm expected to serve.

Not far from where I sit at the head of the table is an antique china closet. It was given to Winifred's parents when they began their housekeeping years more than three-quarters of a century ago. It has, as you might picture now, that curved plate of glass in the front. It's now become a very valuable piece. And even when they first got it, Mother Heim and Father Heim looked upon it as a prized possession.....

....and as their children came into their lives they were constantly on guard, of course, so the family cry went out:

"Thomas! -- stay away from the china closet!"

"Winifred! - - Elizabeth! - - if you have to play, play at the other end of the room! - - - "

...then it was: "Karl, Jr! - Barbara! - Richard!
- David! - Jon! -- stay away from the china closet!"

...and now I find myself saying:

"Timothy! - Christopher! -- stay away from the china closet!"

It was in that china closet Winifred has some precious pieces. And the other day as I sat there and looked at that china closet, happy in the thought, of course, that the glass remains unbroken, I observed the things that she keeps on the shelves....and how seldom she uses them. And when I brought this to her attention, she said, "But we do use them, on certain special occasions."

Now all of this leads me to a text in the Bible -- 2 Timothy, the second chapter, the 21st verse:

". . . a vessel unto honor, meet
for the master's use . . . "

Just as in that china closet there are certain things that Winifred brings out only, if you please, on so-called state occasions, for very special use, so the writer of this Second Letter to Timothy was saying, "A Christian should be looked upon as someone who is kept for very special use by the Master." Now this is the introduction to this sermon. Try not to forget it, will you, particularly its relationship to the specific text which serves as the basis for this sermon. And we'll come back and we'll try to wrap it up as the sermon concludes.

Now let me say to you the understatement of the year: All is not well with the world. Which leads me to quickly observe that ours is a generation that is living from one major disappointment to another, and that is part of

the illness of our time - - we don't quite know how to handle disappointment, we don't quite know how to handle disillusionment. And yet, quite frankly, the shadow of disappointment and disillusionment is something that's been cast upon some of us from the very day that we were born.

- - some of us in this place were born shortly after the Great War, or while the Great War was being fought, and then when we went off to school we read in the history books that there was a man who was President of the United States of America who said "We enter this conflict because the world must be made safe for democracy!" - - and we have had high hopes for democracy.....but in this day and in this age we look upon the democratic process, and some of us are disappointed. Because of the democratic process we've given to certain leaders a mandate, and then we have been disappointed with their performance . . .

- - after World War II we thought in terms of the United Nations, and we had high hopes.....but one doesn't have to be a cynic to say, Where do they lead us? - - what is the practical worth? And throughout the 60's, you see, despite the fact that there was United Nations, we saw the slaughter in Southeast Asia, and this instrument for peace for which we had high hopes seemed absolutely powerless....and we are disappointed . . .

- - we had a great crop of babies on our hands, we talked about the 'baby boom' -- and they grew up to be teenagers and college students ....and some of them pushed, and some of them shoved, and some of them made light of some of the very things that some of us have cherished.....and we were disappointed - - despite the fact that

they did touch a sensitive nerve in the body politic - - but most of us have walked away, and were disappointed . . .

- - we built more school buildings, educated more people to teach ....but we have a generation of students on our hands, and we shake our heads and wonder yet why Johnnie can't read, and why Johnnie can't remember what he's been taught . . .

- - we poured all kinds of money into theological seminaries, and we had high hopes for a crop of preachers that might make the Kingdom much more of a reality than ever before, and we gave them all kinds of tools, and gave them all kinds of buildings and facilities.....only to discover that ours is a generation of declining church attendance, and weak pulpits, and where society at large looks to other agencies and instrumentalities rather than to the pulpit or even to the church for dynamic leadership . . .

We are disappointed.

- - for a while we marveled at the work of the electronic medium industry ..... only to discover that eventually we would call the television the "idiot tube" and the "monster in the living room." We had high hopes....but we were disappointed.

And I stand among you as one who has had to fight a constant battle against the de-humanizing spirit of man, because we have had one disappointment after another.

What now can I say to you? Have you come to this place only to have a man stand at the sacred desk and say that we live in a time of disappointing experiences? Have you come to this place only to have a man occupy your time for a brief period and yet to repeat again and again, we live in a time

of major disappointment? . . . and to share with you a moment of despondency and gloom? Surely this is not what brings you here. And this is not what brings me to the sacred desk! So let's move on quickly.

First, I am in a position to tell you that we are not the first to be disappointed. We are not the first to look upon the entire horizon that surrounds us and to say, All is not well. If one takes the historical perspective, you'll understand why I can say to you:

...in 1848 Lord Shaftsbury said, "Nothing can save the British Empire from shipwreck!"

...in 1849 Disraeli said, "In industry, commerce and agriculture there is no hope!"

...in 1852 the dying Duke of Wellington said, "I thank God I shall be spared from seeing the consummation of ruin that is gathering about us!"

...in 1801 Wilberforce said, "I dare not marry - the future is too unsettled!"

...in 1806 William Pitt observed, "There is scarcely anything around us but ruin and despair!"

So I say to you very quickly, we are not the first to feel this way. It may be an affliction that comes upon every generation. Maybe the historical perspective will force us to believe that there has never been a so-called ideal time in which to live. For perhaps every generation has been afflicted with either a measure of nostalgia -- looking back to a better day that was, and lamenting the fact that they no longer have it . . . or perhaps despairing the present, long for a future that could be far better than the present hour. Perhaps any careful reading of history could bring us to that kind of conclusion. Well, this needs to be said: suffer as we may from despair and disillusionment and discouragement, has there ever been an ideal time in

which to live?

Then I must move on to remind you that one doesn't have to be a theologian to say what I'm about to say. But there is some kind of progress that is being made on the human scene. If you had the proper spectacles, perhaps as he reads history one could discover that there is a golden thread, scarcely discernible perhaps at times, but ever present, which has been leading us on to some better stage.....so that every generation has been part of something better that is being fashioned.

Someone has said that if we reduce the existence of this planet to a 50-year span, it will take 49 of those 50 years until we have any kind of agriculture beyond the primitive stage....

...and in that span of 50 years, writing began only 6 months ago...

...printing only two weeks ago....electricity less than 24 hours ago....

....organized efforts after world-wide peace a few months ago...

...and civil rights, with equal justice toward <u>all</u> came upon the scene only a matter of a few seconds ago....

...if you were to reduce life on the planet to a 50-year span. Which is simply to say that despair and discouragement, progress <u>is</u> being made. We are inching along toward something better.

But let's be very helpful now, if we can. What am I to say to myself? What are you to say to yourself? when you're about to succumb to the series of major disappointments that we're experiencing in our day? <u>How</u> can you fight the battle of cynicism? <u>How</u> can you fight the battle of meaninglessness? How can you fight the battle of uselessness? For against such a background we are prone to say to ourselves, What's the use?

Well I'm happy to bring to your attention that one day, maybe some two thousand years ago, there was a carpenter's son, turned preacher. He spent

a great deal of His time just talking with people, and always trying to introduce the God-factor -- the eternal dimension -- always trying to impress upon them the fact that any life was meant to be important. And that God had use for every single one of them.

Now, my friend, it may not be your lot to go to Capitol Hill....it may not be your lot in life to go to Rockville and sit in the chamber of our County Council....it may not be your lot in life to go to Annapolis. And if you were to ask me, what then is God's plan for my life? - - Specifically, I don't know. But I can always tell you what it includes. It includes a responsibility of making your life accountable in God's sight for some good things. And that some good thing will always include making somebody else's life a little bit better. You begin where you are with what you have.

John F. Kennedy was absolutely right when in one of his addresses he said, "The longest journey always begins with a single step" - - and I would add, -- no matter how short!

And I would say to you with all the strength that I can command, when you and I deplore the fact that we live in a world as wicked as ours, or as disappointing as you find it to be, and you say that the world is peopled with rascals, then I would say to you, your responsibility and my responsibility is to see that there's one less rascal in the world -- that's the point at which you begin!

I'm reminding you that in that place called Galilee there was this carpenter's son, who never got a college education, who never ended with a bank balance to His credit, who never travelled perhaps a hundred miles from the place where He was born. But the world has never been the same since He lived. And why? - - because He made it His business to make His life count as <u>one</u> life, where He was....to the people He touched.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

R.S.

Sermon - the Rev. Raymond Shaheen
The ~~Third~~ Fourth Sunday of Easter — May 5, 1974

"THE SET OF THE SOUL"

Acts 1:25

AS A plant turns toward the sun,
O God, even so our souls turn in
your direction, for we are meant
to respond to you. Let Thy truth
be made plain to us now, as we
look in Your direction. Through
Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord.
Amen.

I want always to be nothing less than honest with you, which leads me to tell you that I'm not at all happy with the first part of the sermon this morning that I'm about to preach. For the sermon deals with a man who went to Hell.

Now he didn't have to go to Hell. But nobody could stop him from going to Hell, because he didn't want anybody to stop him from going to Hell, not even Jesus Christ himself.

The title for this sermon is "The Set of The Soul" and the text is the 25th verse of the first chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

> "Judas fell from the apostles
> that he might go to his own
> place."

Do you remember how it is in Rogers and Hammerstein's Carrousel? - - a young man and a young woman day-dream about how wonderful their life together will be. In the lyrics which they sing comes this line: "When today is a long time ago . . " So lovers think of the passing of the years and dream of even brighter and better days yet to come. The future does unfold, you see, and

every today has a tomorrow. But what also needs to be remembered is that every day has a yesterday!

Mary Ann Shepherd, in appreciation for her years here at Saint Luke, once gave us a sampler which now hangs on a wall in one of the rooms at the Parsonage. It reads like this:

"All The Flowers of All The
Tomorrows Are in The Seeds
of Today"

...which is simply to suggest that today determines tomorrow, all other things being equal.

Now let me talk to you about a man whose tomorrow did come, a tomorrow that was determined by all of his yesterdays. The Biblical recorder puts it down this way as he thinks of Judas Iscariot -- the last time that any mention is made about him at all, he is dismissed with this veiled reference:

"He went to his own place . . "

What now shall we make of this way of putting it? Are we to believe that in the final analysis each one of us ends up very much where he wants most to be? Do we really chart our own course? - - set our own sail? - - determine our own fate? Take a closer look at Judas Iscariot. He was numbered among the Master's men - - he was personally chosen by Jesus Christ. There was that time when Jesus Christ came to him and pointed His finger at him and said, "You're my man!" - - and then He allowed him to be within the company of the twelve. They were all exposed to the same Master, they shared the same fellowship, they listened to the same teachings, they were involved with the same Jesus Christ. We have no reason to believe whatsoever, God forbid, that Jesus Christ ever slighted Judas Iscariot, or any of the disciples as far as that's concerned. He loved them equally well. But the Bible record portrays Judas Iscariot for us as the betrayer.

Did it just happen? On that night of the betrayal, was he powerless at the time? Was he suddenly possessed by a force which he could not resist? The Bible, let it be said again, accounts for him finally by simply stating: "He went to his own place".....which is simply to say, "He arrived at the point where he had been heading."

A wise man once observed that there's a principle here which works in our lives. We do go, each one to his own place. We find our own level according to the secret desire or motivation which is in our hearts. We gather around us the kind of people that we secretly like. We find the friends who are with us one in spirit. We read the books that we want to read...we go to the places to which we want to go....we turn the channel on the television set to the program that we want to view. We make our own world. It can be simply said in that manner.

But now let me hasten to say, children are brought up in the same home -- they have the same teaching -- they have the same opportunities. But as they grow older and pass out of the home, each one goes to his own place . . .

...one seeks for money and pleasure

...another seeks ways of serving his fellow man

...another, maybe, breaks away from the family tradition and indulges his lower tastes and inclinations.....

Oliver Wendell Holmes, bless his soul, compares it to the course of two rivers. They rise in the same mountain-side, but they flow in different directions until a whole continent divides their waters. So people take their different ways in life according to the set of their souls. The poet put it this way:

"From the same cradle-side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to lone darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the placid sea."

That sounds, wouldn't you say, as though we pretty much determine the circumstances in which we eventually find ourselves. An awesome fact, to say the least.

It could be, my friend, that wherever you happen to be right now -- look carefully -- you're probably there amid the circumstances that surround you because at one time or another you either chose to head in that direction or you allowed yourself to drift. In the Southwest there's a road marker. The upright post has two arms on it. You recognize it of course as you visualize it - - - the one side reads Albuquerque...the other reads Los Angeles. And at that particular point you make the decision -- you'll either end up in Los Angeles or you'll end up in Albuquerque. And if you're not sure where you want to go you may even flip a coin to decide in which direction you're going to travel, but even the flipping of the coin does not allow you to escape from an element of responsibility. You can't have it both ways! You can't be in Albuquerque and Los Angeles at the same time. It's one....or the other. And there's always the element of responsibility, which cannot be escaped!

I have little patience with so-called therapeutic measures that are always trying to excuse people from the element of responsibility. God endowed us with the capability of making a choice, and man is never as much a man as he's meant to be, aside from the fact that whom he brings honor and glory to God in loving and serving Him, as when he exercises wisely and well his freedom to choose. Let it be said again and let it be said firmly, whether we care to accept it or not, where we are and the circumstances that may surround us, the situation prevails because that's the direction in which we headed or allowed ourselves to drift, all other things being equal.

Now let me move on very quickly to suggest to you that while this may be true in the realm of circumstances, it is also true in the realm of char-

acter. We become what we are in our hearts. We become what we secretly desire. Life has a way of giving us what we really want! - - if not by actual condition, then certainly by fashioning the character that seeks such things.

I'm numbered among those who lament the fact that one of the things that has passed from the public school scene in many areas is the memorization of poetry. Some of us remember when we were in school, how a requirement was each month that we memorize a given poem, a poem, I presume, that was naturally very carefully chosen that it might inculcate in us at an impressionable age ideals, basic principles of morality and virtue. There was a day when we used to talk much about being "loyal to the royal that is within." We introduced into our curricula body-building courses because we honestly believed that American manhood should be physically fit. Important as that may be, I suggest to you that it's even more important that we should be spiritually trim and vigorous in our morality.

Polonius says to his son, doesn't he, in Shakespeare's "Hamlet" - - "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, that thou canst not then be false to any man." Periodically a man must take himself to task, to ask himself the question as to what kind of person he is becoming, for eventually far more important than what a man has is what a man is, and we're always dealing with the material out of which tomorrow is being fashioned. Tomorrow does come, and it's built upon all the yesterdays that have come and gone.....which is simply to suggest to you that somewhere along the line Judas Iscariot might have taken stock of himself, to see in what direction he was actually heading. He just did not become the betrayer overnight.

In the tragedy of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, Creon is to have said, to the rejected king: "You are not longer an authority. But once when you were in

authority, you brought upon yourself the seeds of your own destruction." - - an awesome thought. But wouldn't it be a terrible thing if this was all I had to say to you this morning! But there's the other side of the coin, and the far more glorious side. As a man may choose to go to Hell, he may also choose to go to Heaven. To every man there opens a high way and a low, and each man decides the way his soul will go . . . and the grand and glorious thought is that Jesus Christ, the pilgrim of the way, is always wooing us in His direction. He's always sending out those gracious intimations of the spirit -- "Follow me -- come after me." He's always saying to us, "I will not leave you, I will not forsake you, I will always surround you with my power and with my love - - I will never fail you!"

John Henry Newman said, "God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nought. I shall do good. I shall do His work." Somewhere along the line Judas Iscariot forget to talk like that to himself, and all the Biblical recorder then could say about him: "Having found his own level, he went to his own place" . . . but Judas Iscariot didn't have to go to Hell.

Come now, what do you think is the most important single question that a man can put to himself? It's not a question, mark you, that you are supposed to apply for the moment to somebody else. Most of us are quite good at putting questions to others. But the real test of character may lie in the questions we ask ourselves and the answers we give. Of all such questions, I suggest to you now, the most important is this: What is the secret longing of my heart? - - What do I want most from life?

> ...for remember, life has a way of giving us what we want most, if not in circumstance, then most certainly in character.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ON GETTING TO KNOW GOD"

Job 22:21

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

The title for this sermon is "Getting to Know God" and the text is from the Book of Job -- it's the 21st verse of the 22nd chapter:

"Acquaint now thyself with God and
be at peace . . . "

Tell me, just where does the preacher begin with a text such as this? Let me read it for you again:

"Acquaint now thyself with God and be at peace."

-- which is the greater problem, the fact that people do not know God as well as they should, or the fact that people lack peace? As far as Job is concerned, maybe there is no problem at all -- it's a situation of both/and, because no matter how you read the text you come to the same conclusion: because people don't know God better than they do they are not at peace, and they will have peace once they really come to know God as He is, and draw their spiritual resources from Him which will enable them to be made adequate in the time of any need.

Whether people realize it or not, down deep inside them there is this craving for peace. To the everlasting credit, I presume, to one of the illustrious predecessors in this pulpit, the Rev. Dr. Raymond Sorrick, who I suppose was more instrumental than any other person in choosing the words to be carved into the stone arch above the red doors to this place. Perhaps you're numbered among the two-thirds of this congregation who come from this

side into the Nave, and perchance if you do come through the red doors you may not look up. In case you haven't, let me tell you now what those words are: "MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU" . . . and I'm absolutely confident that there are some people who keep coming back to this place, Sunday by Sunday, for the measure of peace which they do gain from the hour that they spend here.

Peace is what we crave -- to be at peace with ourselves -- for any number of us, day by day, a constant battle goes on inside us, a whole civil war is going on....

- - some of us have to face the battle that goes on when we think in terms of the encounter that must be ours as we face other people -- if only we knew how to get along with them. Like as not for some people the lesson that has to be mastered isn't so much how to work with people as to work around them, because they are so formidable, and inescapable

I've discovered that there are some people who stock up their medicine cabinet with tablet after tablet and capsule after capsule, just because they want the assurance that they can reach out for something that will guarantee them some measure of tranquility when they have to face the ever-demanding moments of life in the course of any given day . . .

> - - and there are some folks who anticipate a difficult situation -- they know they can't escape it, but they dread the thought of the tensions and the hostilities that will arise once they have to face other people, so they do their best to persuade the family physician to give them a prescription that will guarantee them tranquility, so great is the craving . . .

We are not a people at peace with ourselves. We are not a people at

peace with one another. We are not a people at peace with even other nations in the world. Men crave peace. The writer of the Book of Job says, "You don't have peace because you don't know God as He is -- and if you really knew God as He is, then you would have peace." The writer of the Book of Job honestly believed that in God there were the adequate resources upon which we could draw.

Let a man have some measure of a comfortable balance in his bank, that will hold him in good stead against any emergency, and he seems to have a measure of peace, doesn't he? But oddly enough, we who live in the West have abundant resources, even though they are diminishing, they are still abundant, but we are a restless people, a dissatisfied people, and a people who crave security and peace. In Liberia Winifred and I saw person after person whose only earthly possession was the straw mat upon which he slept at night and the handful of rice that he clutched as he thought of tomorrow .....and yet you could press us hard to find any happier people in many a moon than they.

Well, let's get back to it if you don't mind. I suggest to you this morning with all the strength that I can command that this craving for peace will not be satisfied until we really know God as He is.

Now we have a problem, let's be honest with ourselves -- some people think they know God, but I must come to you to tell you out of my experience that while they think they may know God, they have wrong notions about God, and they suffer from this. Bless his soul, when he first came to us, I think it was his first year among us -- our present Assistant Pastor, young as he was in the ministry, realized that it would be a very valuable thing to give each member of our Saint Luke graduating high school seniors a gift at that significant time in their lives. I remember walking into his office

when he was wrapping the gifts. He had very carefully chosen a book. The book was authored by J. B. Phillips and bore the title: "Your God Is Too Small." Now young as he was in the ministry, he had already discovered what some of us have known only later on in our ministry, and that is that once a person reaches his 20's and enters his 30's, he is very prone to think that he can get along without God, that he can live his life without any reference to God, or perhaps an infrequent reference. And so our Director of Youth Ministry got this book for them, hoping that they might read it, to encourage them to keep up their relationship with God, to keep their acquaintance with Him fresh, vital.

A mother said to me last night, when we were talking about her son who is now beyond his middle 20's, approaching his 30th birthday within a year or so.....she lamented the fact that she hadn't seen him for some time. But this is what she said so poignantly, "What he doesn't realize is this, that time is passing by and all the while he doesn't see us and we don't see him, change may set in. He'll be changing. We'll be changing. And it may well be that whenever he comes back home again we will have to re-establish our relationship, we'll have to get acquainted all over again.

Now happy is the thought that there is always the possibility of re-establishing the relationship and getting acquainted all over again, but in the meantime, knowing that mother as I do, what precious things that young man is denying himself!

Tomorrow night I will not have a pleasant task -- I don't relish it at all, but as the Senior Pastor I'll sit down with one of our task forces (we have several of them appointed this year to take a good hard look at ourselves) - - and the task force that's going to meet tomorrow night is the task force that's dealing with our peripheral members. It's a matter

of fact, we don't deny it, the larger a congregation becomes, the easier it is to get on the periphery. Tomorrow night we'll talk about those people on the periphery of this parish, and on the basis of the study that I've already made, a significant number of them are in the 20- and 30-year brackets. In this period, you see, when they're not paying too much attention about keeping up a vital relationship with God, keeping their acquaintance fresh.

Now I am about to tell you what you may already know -- I think there's one reason why that acquaintanceship is not kept fresh is because they haven't allowed their idea of God to grow as they grow. Now don't get me wrong -- it's a very precious thing to be introduced to God as a kindergartner -- that's a very precious thing. But the concept of God as one who is in the kindergarten may not be the concept of God that will hold us in good stead as one gets older and matures and progresses intellectually.

Now I'll tell you what I mean, bear patiently with me.

- - Some youngsters are taught that God has a big book in front of Him, and He records all of the bad things that we do....and some day God will check that book and hold against us all the bad things that have been part of our life, that God is forever going to punish us. I suggest to you that this is a wrong idea of God if you should be at that point. I'm not saying that you shouldn't begin at that point, but I'm saying that you should not stop in your concept of God at that point.

- - Just as I say to you with all the strength that I can command that it's equally wrong to have the kindergartner's concept of God as a grand old man -- the grandfather image, if you please, who pats us on the back, who will get us out of any kind of a scrape -- a superman kind of a concept who lunges down us suddenly and snatches us from harm and danger - - - it is equally wrong to

have this kind of a concept of God, as though life would never deal us a terrible blow.

....now because people labor with either one of these wrong concepts of God, they eventually get themselves in trouble.

As an example -- why go on believing in God if He keeps records - - alright, you have done what's wrong, you know you've committed your sin, and God hasn't punished you yet - - - there was a time perhaps when you thought if you did something terrible, as a child, that God might strike you dead on Tuesday morning at 10:00 o'clock, or at the earliest at 9:00 - - - so he allows himself to believe that he can go on, permitting himself to believe that God doesn't have to be feared, because it hasn't worked out that way. This is a wrong concept of God, and one we will have disabused, you see, if we keep up our acquaintance.

Another concept of God that perhaps we have had is that God is always threatening us, taking away the things that we enjoy, as though God was meant to be a kill-joy. Puritans did a good job of that, you see, then somewhere along the line some people outgrew that. Some people never do. I read about the God-who-came-to-us-in Jesus Christ - - - I think He could laugh every so heartily. I can picture Him telling a joke, and slapping His thigh as He listened to others tell jokes -- good and wholesome and fully humorous. He went to a wedding -- a happy occasion. He meant life to be enjoyed. But there are some people who never outgrow the notion that if it's thoroughly enjoyable, then it can't be good in the sight of God.

I wouldn't want to embrace a religion that wouldn't allow me to laugh. I knew the first pastor of this congregation when he was a student in seminary -- sure, he was ahead of me, and I can remember how in company with the rest of the students he had to preach in Chapel. And I remember then how Fred Eckert was trying to disabuse the notion that God was a kill-joy, and he told this

little story about the preacher up in New England who had two congregations to serve, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon....

> ....this was years ago, and his only means of conveyance was riding his horse - - and his horse was lame that Sunday and he couldn't keep his appointment - - - unless - - - he resorted to something that he had never done before, getting a pair of skates and skating down the creek from the one church to the other.
>
> That's exactly what he did.
>
> ....and when he arrived at the second point in his charge, the deacons were there, and they saw him skating -- skating on the Sabbath! They called a meeting of the deacons, they took the preacher to task -- how could God smile upon anyone who went skating on the Sabbath?
>
> He tried to tell them exactly <u>why</u> he did it -- it was necessary if he was to keep his appointment to preach the Gospel. He thought he had convinced all of them . . . except one character, stuck out his chin, and his gnarled and curved forefinger straight into the eye of the preacher and said, "But before I cast my vote, there's one thing I need to know -- did ye enjoy the skating?"
>
> .....we need to outgrow the notion that God doesn't want us to be happy.

We need to outgrow the notion that God is a God in a box, that He's to be found <u>only</u> as people come to a certain place, as much as I believe this! But that's not to be meant that He can't be found anywhere else - - we come to find Him here that we may not lose Him beyond these walls!

And this is the way it went: the first man said of a third man to a second man: 'the better you get to know him, the more you will like him.' I suggest to you that it's that way with God, too. Most of us really don't know Him very well. And this is the cause of so much of our trouble. We could have

wrong ideas about Him, just because we've never made it our business to become better acquainted with Him.

Now how can you get to know Him better? One concluding thought: Jesus is that part of God that we can see and know! Said the writer of one of the Epistles: " - - in him (meaning Jesus) all the fullness of God has come to dwell."

> .....I beg you, I implore you, keep up your friendship with Jesus Christ. The more you know Him, the greater He becomes and the more adequate will become your resources - - so that I can now say to you: The peace of God that passeth all understanding keep you . . . .

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

B.S.

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Pentecost - Whitsunday June 2, 1974

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

In the retreat house of Saint Luke Church which is Bethany, there hangs upon the wall in the main room above the sofa a series of full-color photographs. They were taken some two decades ago in the Holy Land. Usually as I look at them my eye fastens particularly upon one of them. It's a large tree, a sycamore in fact, by the bend in the road near the entrance to a town. The town is Jericho.

As I stand there and look at that photograph I have deep thoughts for several reasons. One, I remember the time when I was blessed in being able to be at that very spot. Secondly, as one of the two people who first had laid upon them the sacred obligation to teach the man who is now the other Pastor of Saint Luke Church Bible stories, I recall full well that among the stories taught to him in his childhood none seemed to captivate him more than the story that dealt with the man named Zacchaeus.

There's a third reason why I'm intrigued when I look at that photograph: because I'm constrained to remember something that's a matter of tradition, or a matter of legend. You don't find it itself in Scripture but it's based upon Scripture. Tradition has it that for many a year the townspeople in Jericho saw an old man, bent by the years, shuffling along at a certain hour of the day until he came to a sycamore tree at the edge of town.....and there he would stand, and those who were close enough to read the lines on his face discovered that he was in deep thought.

As you might suppose, someone one time made bold to say to him: "Old

man, what gives? What brings you to this spot? Day by day we've noticed that you've come....nary so much a word to anyone. But then, deep in thought, you leave after a while and shuffle down the road -- what gives?"

The old man is supposed to have said, "My name is Zacchaeus, and it was here at this particular spot years ago that my Master first called me by name. It was here that Jesus Christ looked up and said, 'Zacchaeus!' -- and my life has never again been the same since I was called by Jesus Christ. And so I come back here each day, just remembering. It holds me in good stead."

As I come to this sacred desk I suggest to you, blessed indeed is that man who can go back to certain places, either physically so or traveling memory's route, and think about something that happened that continues to hold him in good stead. And for the Christian, perhaps nothing more so than the time, the moment and the experience when he was given to understand that God called him by name, and he responded. A man is known by the things that he can remember that hold him in good stead. Why else should God have given us the blessing of memory?

We have no Confirmation schedule as such in Saint Luke Church today -- ordinarily it happens on Pentecost as you well know. But this year we're in the transitional period. Confirmation which heretofore had taken place in the eighth grade now will take place in the ninth grade, so we're skipping a year. But by prior announcement as you come this Day of Pentecost, the banners hang from the rafters. We're asking not only those young people who were confirmed in the faith here in Saint Luke Church as they approach the altar today to look back and to remember how they were called by name and claimed by Jesus Christ and the promise they made, but for all who are here simply to remember.

Indulge me for a moment . . . I go back 47 years ago, when in an impressionable moment in my life I was confirmed in the Christian faith. What do I remember?

> -- the sermon?....as much as I want you to pay heed to sermons, I have to confess I don't remember the sermon.
> -- as much as I believe the service is properly enhanced by the ministry of music, I don't remember what the choir sang.....

....but I remember faces. I remember voices. The hand placed upon my head in blessing on that day of Confirmation the same hand that baptized me in the name of Jesus Christ.....I remember the light in his eyes....the dignified way by which he stood in front of the altar.....I remember the solemnity of his voice. It made me believe it was an awesome moment, when something wonderful was really happening, even thought only after a while - - even after the years unfold and the decades pass do I begin to really understand what was happening. Although I was deeply moved at the time.

I remember my parents getting me ready -- not very well versed in the church, not at all familiar with the Luther's Catechism. I remember how they took me to Adams and Young, the only clothing store in town, and got me my new suit. Something wonderful was going to happen, and even this was part of the preparation.

On occasion I go back to that small town. The interior of the church has been changed several times -- redecoration after redecoration has set in, but the walls are the same, and I have deep thoughts when I go back, and remember.

By that same token I've asked your indulgence this morning to suggest that you might go back and remember. Some of you won't have to go back beyond

these walls. Some of you will go back to North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, California.....some of you will go to Denmark, some will go to Norway, some will go to Sweden, some will go to Ireland. Remember now. Hear the voices....see the faces. Re-live for the moment the time when you were nobly intentioned, when you honestly believed that you wanted to be all that God thought you could be, and so you allowed His claim to rest upon you. And you responded.

Both of your Pastors in anticipation of this day, recognizing the fact that we'd have no Confirmation service as such, deemed it right and proper that when the company of the faithful should gather, there should be the re-affirmation of their Confirmation vows. Now in this very precious moment, if you are fortunate enough to come, walk this sacred aisle, approach this altar, within the last eighteen years, have this question put to you:

"Do you love the Lord Jesus -- Do you
promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?"

...remember on this day your response -- while every other person was silent, you alone spoke: "Yes, with my whole heart!"

Maybe you didn't come here. Maybe this Confirmation experience was somewhat different elsewhere. But the essence remains, the ingredients were there. God was calling you by name, and you were responding.

Would you please stand.

I ask you now all over again:

Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise
to serve Him through His Holy Church? If so,
answer, Yes, with my whole heart!

(response by the congregation)

The Father in Heaven, for Jesus' sake, renew and increase in thee the gift of the Holy Ghost, to thy strengthening in faith, to thy growth in grace, ao thy patience in suffering, and to the blessed hope of everlasting life. Amen.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

1974 SAINT LUKE BACCALAUREATE - R.S. (Recorded message)
Sunday, June 9, 1974 - 5:00 p.m. Vespers

Some weeks back when Pastor David and I first discussed this year's Saint Luke Baccalaureate, I learned much to my regret that it was to be scheduled on a day when I would be away. He very graciously encouraged me to follow a noble impulse to record some message that could be shared with you now and in this way.

There are at least three things that I would like to say to you in these two or three minutes available to me.

First, let me tell you that I have gone over the entire roster of your names very slowly and deliberately, one by one, and I would add unashamedly I have gone over the list very prayerfully. In doing so I have recalled again and ever so often some particular relationship that I have had with you during the past years.....

...it may have been when I held you in the crook of my arm and named you for Jesus Christ within the very shadow of this altar where you are now seated...

...it may have been when I stood by your side when you knelt before this same altar and there confirmed your faith in Jesus Christ....

...or it may have been when you and I discussed your Confirmation verse....it may have been when you and I alone talked about God's place in your life as we sat in the quiet of our retreat house which is Bethany.....

...it may have been when you called me one night about the death of a loved one, and I did my best in God's name to help you remember the promises of Christ in your time of sorrow....

So I've gone over your names, one by one, and I've thought very deeply about the days that have come and gone.

Now the second thing that I want to tell you is that I've gone over your names one by one and thought of you in this very present moment. The glow of increasing maturity is upon you, right now. Some of you have already reached a most remarkable level of spirituality. I marvel at your depth of understanding of God and His claim upon your life.

The third thing that remains to be said is that as I think of you one by one, I visualize the future as it unfolds. I haven't the slightest idea where you will be ten years from now, but I do know that within the next ten-year period of your life practically every major decision that you will be called upon to make will determine very largely the nature and the character of the rest of your life....within the unfolding of the next ten years.

....most of you will have decided upon your life work, you will have chosen your life partner, you will have agreed upon in your own mind what your basic attitude is concerning yourself....other people....God.

...in most cases, I presume, you will be married and share the responsibility of parenthood for a child or two....

...this is the way I visualize you in 1984 - -

Happy.....or sad

Satisfied.....or frustrated

Defeated.....or confident

...all of this according to the measure of Christ-likeness that now claims you.

Therefore I say to you: "Study to show yourself approved unto God" That's a bit of Scripture, you know -- Paul's advice to a young man named Timothy. Freely translated, it means: "Never give up on trying to please God" - - - for the only thing that really matters now, and always, is how pleasing your life would be in God's sight.

In this moment now I wish you well and assure you of my continuing thought and prayer in all that lies ahead. God bless you. He needs you, and what is more -- you need Him!

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday After Pentecost June 16, 1974

"THE END OF ALL - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

I am not so sure that I recommend it to you, but let me tell you of something that I am prone to do, wittingly or unwittingly, when I find myself in someone's place of business...

...as an example, if I am dining out, I discover that when I am seated there, before I know it I am re-decorating the place....or I may be saying to myself, if I were in charge of the personnel, how would I go about reprimanding this waiter or waitress for their inefficiency and their incompetence?.....or perchance if I discover that one of them happens to be unusually courteous, how would I go about introducing into my scheme of things, if I were in charge of the personnel, a recognition of this fine trait and characteristic on the part of this person?.....

...or perchance when I drive into a gas station, I look around and see some of the debris that troubles me as I wait and until I get the attention that I'm asking for....or perhaps if the attendant doesn't lift the hood, how I'd go about introducing some kind of motivation, if I were in charge of that station? . . .

What I'm simply saying to you is this: that every now and then I find myself asking such questions - - if I were responsible for this place, how would I go about discharging my obligation?

Which leads me to suggest: that as I stand here this morning, I wonder how many of you there may be who say to yourself as the preacher stands at the sacred dask - - now if I were preaching the sermon, this is the way I'd go about it. Let me reverse the process for the moment.

> ...suppose you were the preacher - - how would you handle the text that lays its grip upon my soul this morning? How would you preach the sermon? How would you deliver it?

Well, whatever your answers may be, you may be interested in knowing how I've gone about this sermon so far.

> ...first, I've discovered that the text is irresistible. I cannot ignore it. It lays its claim upon my soul and therefore I feel that I am constrained to preach to you about it....
>
> ...then once I recognize the validity of the text, what's the next thing that happens? Well, you ought to know this -- it's always the bowed head in prayer. For no man has a right to deal with Scripture who doesn't deal with it prayerfully. And what is the substance of the prayer? Something of this nature:
>
> > ...God, I'm not worthy to deal with this text. I can't possibly understand it to the fullest. I need Your help. Enable me to so understand it that perhaps I can make it a bit more understandable to other people. And then, God, cleanse my soul that by Your grace I may be made worthy to deal with Your precious truth . . .

Now all of this goes into the making of a sermon. Don't ever forget it.

Having done that, there's another step, if you're interested. And that is the preacher may reach for other translations, for as he reads other translations he gets insights that otherwise he might not have. Let me give you an example -- not the text for this sermon, but in the old King James Version,

the Apostle is talking about what happens when Christ takes over a man's soul.....the old King James Version of 1611 puts it this way:

"If any man be in Christ he becomes a new creation . . "

Bless J. B. Phillips -- with a fresh touch, precise, puts it this way:

"If any man be in Christ he becomes a brand new person altogether . . . "

You see the advantage of reading more than one translation? And happy indeed is the man, if he's knowledgeable in the original tongues -- he can reach for his Greek, his Aramaic, his Hebrew text.

And now as an example, by your leave, let me read for you at least five different translators who have dealt with this text which is I Peter, the 4th chapter, the 7th verse. The introductions are practically the same, but the concluding remarks invariably have a different twist:

"We are near the end of all things now, and you should therefore be calm, self-contained men of prayer . . . "

...another translator:

"The end of all things is now. You must be self-contained and alert to be able to pray . . . "

...still another (again I said, the introductions are pretty much the same):

"The end of all things is upon us, so you must lead an ordered and sober life to be given to prayer . . . "

...now this is my favorite -- Moffett's translation:

"Now the end of all is near. Steady, then. Keep cool. Pray . . . "

...William Barclay put it this way:

"Be therefore steady and sober in mind, so that you will really be able to pray as you ought . . . "

Now this is the text:

"Now the end of all is near. Steady then.
Keep cool....and pray . . . "

I don't know how many of your acquaintances fall into this category but I've discovered some in recent years who tell me very earnestly that they believe the end is at hand, that this old world of ours has gotten just about as bad as it can get, and God has it up to His neck. Therefore God, then, being tired with us, having given us one chance after another to respond to His redeeming touch and not finding that His efforts are very productive, according to this school of thought that's represented by some of my friends - - God's had it! And He's going to pull down the curtain, even within our lifetime, and the end is at hand. I have some friends who honestly believe this.

And I have my moments when I am convinced as to why they can think the way they think. I don't know where you may be in your thinking along this line, but I do know that when these words for this text were written by the Apostle Peter, that was the thinking of the early church - - they honestly believed the end was at hand.

Now I want you to shift gears for a minute, if you don't mind. But before you shift those gears I want to tell you why I want you to shift the gears. Some of you may have known him....he wasn't a member of this parish, but had lived practically all of his life in metropolitan Washington. He and his wife left last weekend, I think it was, for the Blue Ridge Mountains. Sensitive, they wanted to breathe anew the beauty of God's created world, particularly all green and growing things at this time of the year. So they went back to where they were accustomed to going before, they put in at the lodge.

...and one of the things that they wanted to do on Wednesday, then, was to take the bus that the lodge provided as a courtesy....go as far as they could to the top, and then they'd walk the remaining distance until they could breathe the beauty in to their hearts' content.....

> ...he didn't take very many steps until he slumped to the ground, without any warning whatsoever. He never recovered.

I conducted the services for that family yesterday morning. The end came - - without any warning. Now this is why I am asking you to shift gears, and for heaven's sake, understand me correctly. This is not intended to be a downright morbid thought, but when I stand at this sacred desk I am in duty bound to be realistic.

Now let me suggest to you that suppose by some strange measure of revelation, I don't know how it would happen, but suppose by 12:00 o'clock today you were privy to inside information that come Wednesday of this week your earthly pilgrimage would be completed, that there would be no question about it in your being so informed today. Now let me say it again, I don't know how you'd get this information, but you'd have reason to believe that it would be valid - - - Wednesday of this week the curtain would come down.

Now my question is: You have this afternoon, you have tonight, you have Monday morning, you have Monday afternoon, you have Monday night, you have all day Tuesday, you have Wednesday morning to think about it . . .

> ...in the light of a truth such as that, how would you behave? Not only what would you think, but what would you do?.....

It's this kind of thing that the Apostle Peter took very seriously, and against this kind of thing gave a bit of advice as it's expressed in this

text.

Now I know that not very many of you think along this line, and I'm also close enough to some of you to know that if you did, you'd probably frighten yourself to death in the face of a prospect as imminent as Wednesday noon. But having said all of that - - now shift your gears and get back to the days of the early church.....it might be a bit more comfortable to think about that!

> ....so the Apostle Peter says, "Now the end of all is near. Let me give you this advice: steady now! -- keep cool! -- pray!"

I never cease to marvel at how much basic common sense there is in the Scriptures. You'll notice what he's saying first: "In the face of the end that is near, keep yourself under control.....you don't panic...you don't lose your senses." He doesn't even say the first thing you do is to pray. He says the first thing that you do is to stabilize yourself.

Now just to show you how much common sense that really is, if you were ever to be found in a gathering of people and somebody yelled "Fire!" ....and you lost control of yourself, do you think then you would be in a position to handle a fire extinguisher? Or if in the face of an emergency you recognized that the crisis was upon you then and there and you began to panic - - - how do you think you would be able to handle the situation if you've already lost control of yourself?

You don't have to tell me what I hope by this time you recognize as part of my basic philosophy, that prayer is the great resource that God is constantly making available to us, but I suggest to you that some of us even in the time of an emergency don't know how to handle it! Because losing control of ourselves, we really don't appreciate how wonderful prayer

itself is.

Now I'm not belittling the fact that in the time of crisis the first thing that some people will do will be to pray. And when they pray, their prayer may be of this type: "God, where are you?" - - "Come on, God, do something! -- get with it! - - don't delay! - - Take over, God!"

> ...now believe me and believe me well, that for any number of people in the time of crisis that is the kind of prayer that we offer.....

And I suggest to you that there are different levels of prayer. This is not the highest! This is one of the lowest levels of prayer, because it's the prayer of a person who is prone to panic. And if he panics and presses the panic button, he wants somebody else to take over completely. And wittingly or unwittingly he relieves himself of certain responsibilities that only he ought to be able to exercise.

So says the Apostle Peter: "Keep yourself under control -- steady now -- and then you pray, that you might be able to pray aright!" And for the right reasons!

And then the Apostle Peter went on to do something for those people -- you can read about this for yourself in all that he wrote. He said something that I am sure may have startled them, something that may startle you. He said that even though the end is near at hand, you've got to recognize the fact that between now and when the end does come, you may have to suffer! You may have to pay a price! Just because you are a believer, do not permit yourself to think that you're going to be immune from the pain and the price which is life itself.

Now some of us make a big mistake. We permit ourselves to think that just because we believe fervently in Jesus Christ, that we won't have to run

the same type of course that other people have to run through life. That just isn't true! All the problems which constitute life itself come to all of us, whether we are Christian or not.

Among the joys that I experienced last week was to interview several couples who are looking forward to being married, one of them as Christian as any couple could be. And I was thoroughly gratified in everything that we talked about - - their demeanor, their concern. And as they walked away and I closed the door I thought to myself, precious as their faith is, little may they realize all the problems that life may bring to them, and just because they happen to be as Christian as they are, they will not be free from them.

Now says the Apostle Peter, "Keep yourself steady....calm, now - - " (a free translation would be: keep yourself calm, cool and collected -- keep a hold of yourself).....and then you pray. And when you pray as Peter understood it, and you and I should understand it, you're not asking God to give you an escape route. He may on occasion, but that's the low level of praying. The high level of praying is that you ask God to help you to see a situation through! You're not forgetting, are you, that even though Jesus Christ prayed as earnestly as He did in the Garden of Gethsemane, still after Gethsemane came Calvary. Gethsemane did not guarantee Him a route around the price that had to be paid.

We had delightful and profitable dinner conversation the other night when we were guests in a certain home - - - and by the way, quite incidentally, somebody has said that the best thing about a meal sometimes may be not only the food but the conversation. There in the presence of this man who had lived some time, out of his store-house of wisdom he gave us this precious gem: "People make a mistake," he said, "when they allow themselves to think

that the big thing in life is the pursuit of happiness. It isn't. The big thing in life is mastering the art of adjustment!"

...and a free translation of that would be:

learning how to handle what you cannot avoid....

...and from the Christian standpoint, adjusting to the situation by the grace and the power of God in order to handle the situation triumphantly.

Well, my friend, said the Apostle Peter:

"The end of all is near. Steady then.
Keep cool, and pray."

I don't know how near the end is for any of us. I don't pose as a prophet nor as the son of a prophet. But I know that there lies ahead the end, and no man escapes it. And the advice of the Apostle Peter is worthy of our respect. Get ready for it. Keep yourself under control and keep yourself in link with God. For prayer basically is allowing all the resources of Heaven to be made available to you.

...then whenever the end comes, no matter when nor how, it can come triumphantly! And that's what makes living worthwhile.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

B.S.

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Ordination Service for Charles Mercer Zimmerman June 16, 1974

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let's begin where we ought to begin. Just why are we here today, and now? Some of you are here undoubtedly because this is where you belong. This is where you were baptized in the Christian faith, this is where you were named for Jesus Christ. And as has been your holy custom, you keep returning to this holy place.

> ...some of you are here because this is the Lord's Day, and even though you may not be a member of this particular congregation, you have been taught respect for the Day of the Lord, and no matter where you may be you always find it possible to mark the path that leads to God's House, wherever it may be.....
>
> ...some of you are here because basically you understand yourselves as members together in the Family of God, and members of a family ought to be drawn to each other, and particularly when they find themselves in the House of their Father.....

Now some of you happen to be here because you are members of one man's family in particular. You may happen to be his grandmother....you may happen to be his father or his mother....you may happen to be his wife. You are here because this is a great moment in the life of one who is very precious to you.

Some of you can't possibly think of a day or a night that has come and gone without your asking God to bless him, to watch over him, that he might grow, mark you, in Christian grace and stature.

Now all of us are here for any one of these reasons . . . every single one of us here for one reason or another in particular. Let it be clearly stated, this is a great moment in the life of Charles Mercer Zimmerman.

But as Lillian Hellman has one of her characters in "Autumn Gardens" say, "There really is no such thing as a great moment in any man's life per se." For even though we may label it as such, a great moment properly understood is simply the accumulation of all the wonderful moments that have preceded it. So that this special moment in the life of Charles Mercer Zimmerman, great as we may call it, has to be seen against the background of all those other wonderful precious moments that have gone before.

- - there was that precious moment when he was named for Jesus Christ -- introduced into the Family of God. This was no small moment in this life.....

- - nor was it a small moment in his life when Dorothy, Sunday after Sunday, who readied him for Sunday School and you brought him with you, and you allowed others to nurture his soul in your behalf, in behalf of yourself and of his father....that was no simple moment when Sunday School teacher after Sunday School teacher here in this place taught him respect for the fundamental truths of God.....

- - that was no small moment when Charles Mercer Zimmerman sat with people such as Rodney Hader, and Rodney Hader had thrust upon him the sacred obligation of teaching him part of Luther's Catechism....

- - that was no small moment in his life when he knelt before this very altar and publicly declared his faith in Jesus Christ... ...and when the question was put to him: "Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?" - - - without any hesitation, with the conviction far greater than his years would allow, he answered, "Yes, with my whole heart!"

- - it was no small moment in his life when in company with a group of others of his peers we met in that other piece of holy ground which is Saint Luke Church, Bethany, our retreat house. And as we sat there, at a very impressionable age, it was made plain to him that God still needs men, and that God has His own way of making a claim upon them, and that God can use them in a very special way as pastors.. . . . . he in company with one other honestly believed, as a result of that encounter at Bethany, that God had use for them.....

These were no small moments.

And this moment today has to be seen against that moment when the decision was made that he would go to college, he'd head for a theological seminary where seed would be sown that would germinate and bring forth fruit,. the first garnering of which we are privileged to glean today. The moment of Ordination, special and wonderful as it is, must be properly seen as the accumulation of all those wonderful moments that have preceded it.

As I stand at this sacred desk, as is my custom I must share with you a word of Scripture. I can't possibly come to this sacred desk without having the Good Book in front of me. I would not be faithful to my high

calling and I would bring disrespect to this occasion if I were to preach unless all that I could say to you could be rooted and grounded in the Scriptures, particularly as we are mindful of the fact that we are setting aside one who is to be a Minister of the Word! And now, Charles, this text that's been carefully chosen for this occasion, constitutes the words of advice given by an older man to a younger man who felt the claim of God upon his soul. The text is recorded in First Timothy, the fourth chapter, the sixteenth verse:

> "Take heed unto yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this thou shalt both serve thyself and them that hear thee."

The text lends itself beautifully to a sermon. For you may have been taught, Charles, as others before you have been taught, that if at all possible a sermon to be well balanced should have three points or three divisions. And the text lends itself beautifully to that kind of thing.

Point Number One: "Take heed unto yourself . . " -- a free translation would be this: Pay attention, Charles, to Charles Zimmerman. Take yourself seriously. Recognize always your identity. Says the older man to the younger man about to be set aside for the Ministry: "Take heed to yourself."

> ...you won't be worth much to your congregation, Charles, if you don't keep yourself spiritually fit. You must always remember who you are. There ought not to be any such thing as an identity crisis in your life. As long as you live you ought to keep saying to yourself, "I am Charles Zimmerman, a child of God, called by God to be a servant in His Holy Church. I am meant to be a pastor . . . . "

As Martin Luther kept reminding himself through one crisis after another through which he had to go, the only think that enabled him to keep his sanity: "I am baptized, I am God's child." - - - so as it could be as the years unfold for you, with one blessed chapter being written after another, with one difficult chapter being written after another: Pay heed to yourself - - - don't ever forget who you are.

In Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman," there is that very sad moment, the little family circle gathers around the grave, and they lay him to rest. And one of his sons laments soulfully, "What a pity. He never really knew who he was."

I am numbered among those who honestly believe, Charles, that a pastor is a special person. Not that he allows himself vain qualities, God forbid, but special in the sense that he's called by God for special purposes. These thirty-four years that God has allowed me to spend in the ministry have allowed me to define for myself what I think a pastor is meant to be. And as I remember it I gather strength. And what is this simple definition?

A Pastor is God's particular person, for a
particular purpose, to a particular people,
in a particular place.

....you are meant to be their shepherd, in a sense that no other member of that Body of Christ has been called. This is what makes you special: because of the purpose that claims you as you are sent to a particular people.

In Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Carousel" - - remember there are the two lovers. And as lovers are wont to do, they think and they dream of the days yet to come. They take that long, long look, and there's a line in the

lyric from "Carousel" that goes like this: "When today is a long time ago." You have a right, in this precious moment, to take a long look to the unfolding of the years - - - to Pastor Charles Mercer Zimmerman --

-- ordained - 10 years

...20 years

...by the grace of God, 30 years

...by the grace of God, 50 years.....

...and as those years pass God grant that some day someone might say of you, as Oliver Goldsmith said of the village priest, the village parson, in "The Deserted Village" - -

"At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools who came to scoff, remained to pray,
The service past, around the pious man,
With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran:
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to spare the good man's smile.
His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed;
Their welfare pleased him and their cares distrest;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form
Swells from the vale and midway leaves the storm,
Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Take heed to thyself, Charles Zimmerman, and these are the words that some day by the grace of God, someone shall say of you. Now is the time to get ready. Now is the time to walk in that direction. The Pastor that you are meant to be you are now in this moment becoming. Take heed to thyself. You cannot give what you have not received.

The Second Point of the text: Take heed to the doctrine.

You are ordained a Minister of the Lutheran Church, and in the Lutheran

Church we are happy to say that any man set aside for the Gospel Ministry must root and ground himself in the Scriptures! Don't allow a single day to pass without reading the Scriptures for your own edification -- not simply for the preparing of a sermon. As you grow spiritually, so your people will grow spiritually. I have no ideas what winds of doctrine will come and go before your ministry will be ended. I look back over these three-and-a-half decades that God has allowed me and I have my moments when I smile when I think of the changes that have come and gone - - - and how the man who has been committed to preaching the plain unvarnished truth of God, the simple doctrine of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, has been the only preacher of the Word who has continued to feed the souls of his people and proven himself the good pastor.

Charles, you have heard me say it before....John Wesley, said one historian, did more for his generation than any other person who lived, and oddly enough, he was a preacher. He traveled up and down England. They say he had an old white horse. He got up at five o'clock in the morning, he preached to the men as they went down into the mines....he preached to the people as they gathered in the village square at midday....he preached to the farmers coming back from their fields at night. He kept a diary. Like as not, they tell me that in each entry that he made he said where he had been, what had happened.....and like as not, the final sentence as he closed that chapter for the day: "I gave them Christ! - - I gave them Christ!" Let this be the chapter in your life day after day as you minister to people.

Hard by the pulpit in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia, John Brokhof, the able Pastor of that congregation who saw its walls constructed, deliberately chose these words to be carved into

that stone: "SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS" - - - and so give heed to the doctrine, that wherever you may go, whatever you may do, Jesus Christ may come through. You are meant to be a communicator of Jesus Christ, that's what you're meant to be.

The final part of the text:

> "Give heed to yourself and to the doctrine,
> and by doing so you will save both them you
> teach and yourself."

The final part of the sermon of course is this: You must never take your mind off of the people to whom God sent you to minister. The founder of the Salvation Army once referred to himself as a "Straight-shooter For Souls." He looked upon every person that he met as a candidate for Heaven. He looked upon every person that he met as someone for whom God came through Jesus Christ to suffer, and to live triumphantly. Take heed to this, Charles. Never write any man off! There is such a thing as the grace of God, and there is such a thing as the power of conversion. And you're meant to be God's agent, to help bring this about. Give heed to them to whom you will minister.

Said John Henry Cardinal Newman:

> "God has created me to do Him
> some definite service;
> He has committed some work to me
> which He has not committed to another.
> I have my mission - -
> I am a link in a chain,
> A bond of connection between persons.
> He has not created me for naught.
> I shall do good. I shall do His work . . . "

And this you will do, Charles, as you preach and as you live among your people.

In my study here, not far from this place where I am standing, the other

of our two sons gave his father an interpretation of Saint Francis of Assissi which I cherish. Timothy and Christopher's Uncle Jon did this original interpretation of Saint Francis.

He ought to have a claim upon your soul because Francis had a passion for people. He gathered around him some people that he taught how to preach. And one day, Charles, a neophyte came to him. He said, "Please -- please, Father in the Faith, take me to the village today and let me see how you preach."....he nagged him, he kept after him. And then finally one day the blessed Saint Francis said, "Today we shall go to the village." ...and the neophyte was all excited because that was the day -- at close range he'd see the master preach.

...they got up early in the morning, they went to the village.. ...they helped an old lady across the street....the comforted a woman who had lost her son that day....they spent the whole day just talking to people, being kind and being gracious.

...and when they came home, the neophyte lamented and said, "But Master, you said today we would preach, and you said nary so much as a word!" Francis said, "But don't you understand -- as we gave these people a simple chapter in our life this day, and walked among them - - as we walked we preached!"

Charles, a good pastor preaches with words.

A better pastor masters the art of also preaching without words.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday After Pentecost June 23, 1974

"TO FLEE FROM FEAR"

(I John 4:18)

WE MAKE so little time to do this sort of thing, O God, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. Now that we're about to do it, we need the help of Your Holy Spirit. We're grateful for it. Amen.

I have never known a man who wasn't afraid of something or someone. Sooner or later, no matter how bold a face he was able to give, fear had a way of taking a crippling effect upon him.

They tell me that it's natural to be afraid. They tell me that every child that's born into this world is born with at least two basic fears: the fear of a loud noise and the fear of a fall. And that can be one reason why when you hold a child, you may permit yourself to think that he is responding securely to the fact that you are supporting him close to your own body.

Now if we're born with two basic fears, goodness knows how many we acquire as we grow older. Let me suggest that at the very beginning we recognize the fact that fear can serve a useful purpose, and maybe that's part of our problem. There is some good that does come from fear....

...some people ought to have the fear of God stamped down deep in and through their hearts

...some people ought to have the fear that is respect for authority branded upon them

...some people out to have fear made very clear to them that

> you can't tamper with the basic rules and laws of God and the basic principles of morality without being burned.....

Fear also serves a useful purpose for the growing child. Don't we teach him, and teach him well, that he should look to the right and to the left very carefully before crossing the street, lest a car come quickly and run him down? Don't some of us take the necessary precaution, once we've stepped upon a nail, just because we are afraid of infection? There is a purpose to be served by being afraid. But I'm not going to talk to you about that aspect of fear this morning. I want to talk to you about the aspect of fear that cripples us.

Let me suggest to you that some people are afraid of the past. In the years gone by they have allowed themselves some measure of indiscretion -- they rue the day that they ever allowed certain people to have a kind of an influence on them, to take them certain places and to do certain things, which to the end of their days now they'll be forever ashamed that they were ever a party to that kind of a thing. There are some people who look back over the past and they're haunted by the fear of its catching up with them, that perhaps some day someone will reveal to others the knowledge to which he has been privy....and he's always afraid that his past will catch up with him....

> ...not only is he afraid of it himself, but he's afraid of the fact that there are some people who will never have done with his past, who in their own way are always reminding him of it, who have never known what a wonderful thing it is to be blinded to some of the things for which a man remains ashamed to the very day that he dies.

There are some people who are afraid of the present moment. The past is over, and maybe by the grace of God they've learned how to handle it, but the present moment? - - it's so unavoidable, it's so inescapable. It's today, you see, that you have to keep that appointment at 10:00 o'clock with the man that you dread. He's fierce competition for you. He's always a threat. But you can't escape it - - you have to face him today. It's today, you see, with time running out on you, when the decision has to be made in regard to this problem or in regard to this matter, and you can't put it off any longer. And there are some people who are dreadfully afraid of the pressing demand of the present moment....

> ...yesterday is over, and tomorrow hasn't yet come....but how can I handle what I can't escape right now? It can be so very crippling.

Then there are those who are afraid of the future. They think of what has happened to other people before they have ended their years, their earthly pilgrimage. They know how physical and mental deterioration has taken its toll. And they have their moments when they think of their years yet to come and they say, and it could happen to me - - where will I live? - - who will take care of me? - - how can I manage on a reduced income? - - how can I manage when I no longer have the stimulation and the challenge of the work that now claims me?

> .....there are people who are afraid of the future.

Now this sermon has a text -- I'm not forgetting that, and it's the basic Scripture that justifies everything that I'm trying to share with you. There was a grand and good man who wrote a letter to some Christians when the Church was very young. His name was John. In fact, he wrote three letters.

In the first letter that he wrote -- you can read it for yourself, the 4th chapter, the 18th verse, he says something about people being tormented by fear, and then he says:

"But perfect love casts out fear . . "

Now you daren't forget to whom he was writing, and the background against which he was writing. He was writing to some people who were quite afraid to die, because they were given to understand in that day that the end of the world was near at hand. They were always living out their days within the shadow of the Great White Throne.....and he discovered, Christians though they were, that they were afraid to die. And so he wrote them this Letter, and he kept hammering away that they shouldn't even be afraid of death. He'd help them to get ready for it.

Now I ought to tell you that there is something that troubles me and I really don't know what to make of it. I'll be grateful for whatever insight you might be able to share with me. But it's only been about three times in recent years that as your Pastor I have been called upon by any member of this congregation to help a person get ready to die.

There was a time in the church when the pastor spent a great deal of his time ministering to the dying, and to help them get ready for the moment of death.

> ...oh, I have an idea why this may be true today. One is, thanks to medical science, we have any number of drugs that have a sedative effect. And so as a person may be terminal and near the end, he's numbed into dying. He's no longer alert. He's not aware of the fact that it is imminent.....

And so therefore there's no need, you see, there's no cause, to have the preacher loom on the horizon and to have a person get ready.

I could settle for that one, because this I can understand.

But there's a second reason that occurs to me that I can't ignore. And this troubles me a great deal. There are some people who tell me that ours is a generation where people no longer think in terms of God as once they did, and so they're not afraid of the Judgment. They're not only not afraid of the fact that death could come, but they're not afraid of what may happen after death. A grand and good man of our day has said that a sad commentary upon our generation is this: that we are a people for whom Hell has no torment, and Heaven has no invitation. We just don't think of going to Hell and being punished. And we're not excited about going to Heaven and being blissfully happy. So who's afraid to die?

Some of us were brought up, and we're not ashamed to tell you, by the tradition that led us to believe that God, seated in Heaven, had in front of Him a great book. And in that book He kept a record of all the things that we said and did, the good things and the bad things. And then there would be a time of Judgment, and we'd be encountered by God, and we'd either pass or we wouldn't pass. I don't know that people do much thinking in that direction any longer.

And maybe I have to say to you that maybe it could be that people aren't so much afraid of dying as they are afraid of living, because of what I've already indicated to you as the future may unfold for a person, all the things that he may have to meet in this present world are enough to almost scare any man to death.

"Now," says this grand and good man who wrote
the Letter - - "I want to tell you something.
Perfect love casts out fear."

Now what did he mean by that?

He simply meant, it seems to me, that if you understand the basic nature and character of God, the crippling blow which is fear can be handled.

Now what is God like? Don't you remember the three-worded definition that we had for God as youngsters? - - God is love. And I want to give you my definition of love: To love is to meet the need of another person.

> ...and you never really understand what God is like until you understand Him as being loving, and to prove it He gave us Jesus Christ, because in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

When our Blessed Lord was here on ~~ku~~ earth He called together a group of His disciples once and He realized that they were going to be fearful of what would happen to them after He was gone. And then He said to them quietly and calmly the words to which you turn ever so often in the New Testament -- it's the one passage in your Bible that you especially cherish:

"Let not your heart be troubled - - "

" - - don't be afraid!" - - that's God speaking to us!

Now it's one thing to tell a person not to be afraid. It's another thing to be able to tell him why he need not fear. And then Jesus went on to do that. And as He spoke to them He gave them to understand that His basic nature and character never changes - - God is never less than love! And that's why some of us look back over our earlier days when we had done something wrong, and we were afraid to face our father. But the only ameliorating benefit that came from it, despite the punishment that we were not spared, was the fact that we knew that he loved us. So I say to you as I say to myself, so you're afraid because of your sin, and you're afraid your sin will find you out? I have good news for you, friend - - the God who deals with us as sinners is a loving,

gracious Heavenly Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ also said, "I will never leave you! - - I will never forsake you! - - I will always be with you!" And some of us are absolutely unafraid as long as we can have the assurance that we can be found in the presence of someone who is stronger than we are. A crippling blow comes to any man when suddenly he finds himself bereft of the strength that comes through companionship. And if you and I can understand that on a human level, think how much more wonderful it is to be able to appreciate, then, the fact that God says to us, "There will never be a situation in which I will not be found -- I'll always be with you."

William James, bless his soul, used to tell the students up at Harvard, as he would end somee of his lectures, that he wanted them to think in terms of a faith-ladder . . . you go from one rung to another up the ladder.

> ...you would begin with something that seemed reasonable to you, and because it seemed reasonable to you you would trust it, then you would go up the next rung, to something that you'd think in the mind of God could exist.....and theny you permit yourself to believe that it <u>did</u> exist, and then you'd order your actions accordingly.....

...and that made all the difference in the world.

Now Jesus Christ is saying to us, "<u>Believe</u> these things - - <u>accept</u> these things! I will never leave you! - - "

" - - don't be afraid - - I'll be within reach!"

" - - My peace I will give to you -- not the ~~torture~~ torture of an angry God, but the peace of the pardoned - - "

" . . And then don't be afraid when the end comes. You won't be left out. There is such a thing as Heaven, and I'll have a place for you."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

AMERICA - AND GOD'S MERCY

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

In the time that remains for the sermon let me be brief, direct, precise. I am fully aware of the fact that this the Sunday that introduces the week in which there is a particular day in which we remember all over again the bent of this nation. Now let me say at once -- you have heard aright, my friend....the hymns that have been chosen especially for this day are all hymns that have to deal with our nation. You have heard aright.

The second thing, you have seen aright.....close by the reading desk, the lectern, here in Saint Luke Church is a flag which is the symbol of our loyalty to a particular nation, the United States of America.

Now I am fully aware that there are some congregations where this would not happen. Strange as it may seem to you, I know some men who wear the cloth who would never so much as allow the flag of a particular nation to be in their chancel, for they are committed to the basic concept, as they see it, that the Christian church has no loyalty to any particular country, and that when Christians gather together, they must recognize the fact that they are citizens primarily of the Kingdom of God. And by that same token, there would be no singing of patriotic hymns.

Now we do not subscribe to that notion as such, as you fully know. Here in Saint Luke Church the flag is visible Sunday by Sunday. Here in Saint Luke Church on occasion we do sing hymns that are particularly related

to our nation. And every day, weather permitting, on the church lawn there flies, as one of the two flags, the symbol of our loyalty to our nation.

Now having said that, let me read for you the text, the text that has prompted all that I'm about to say to you. The words of Psalm #67 begin in this fashion:

> "God be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause your face to shine upon us . . . "

...the writer of that Psalm honestly believed that he had a right to ask God to pay attention to his people, that he had a right to say, "God, look in our direction!" - - - that he had a right to say, "God, of all the people on the face of the earth, don't forget us, and give us a favorable glance."

Now I raise the question in your presence, is it a valid thing that we in America could ask God to bless us? Dare we, as one nation among many, turn to God and say, "God, give us a favorable glance"? - - "God, give us some measure of Your attention!" - - ? My answer without any hesitation is an absolute YES. Just as I have told you on occasion that you have a right to turn to God and to talk to God about yourselves, every individual has a right to turn to God and say, "God, I have certain needs - - God, I am Your child! - - - God, I'm asking for Your blessing! - - - God, I'm asking for Your strength, I'm asking for Your favor."

....I wouldn't give much for a man in his prayer life if he refused to ask God to pay some attention to him. Because if we are to be God's vessels, if we are to be God's instruments, then we must receive from God what we need to do God's work and to perform His will.

Now I'm not unmindful of the fact that here in the United States of America, we on occasion think in these terms. For have we not written into our Salute to the Flag " . . a nation under God . . " - - ?

- - have we not imprinted in the coin of the realm:

"In God We Trust" - - ?

- - do we not take from the public treasury funds by which to pay a man who guarantees that every time the House of Representatives is in session, the very first thing that's done is to turn the direction of that House of Representatives toward God - - - ?

...and by the same token we dip into the public treasury and pay a man who guarantees that every time the United States Senate is in session, they should turn their thoughts in the direction of God - - ?

- - is it not so that every time we inaugurate a man as President of the United States of America, that he takes his oath solemnly by placing his hand upon the Good Book - - - ?

Do I have to remind you that when this nation was born, there were those who said, there can be no hope for us and we can have no foundation unless we recognize ourselves as a people under God? And so the charter for this nation of ours breathes of the essence of the eternal dimension, the very fact of God.

Now again the question has to be raised: Dare we allow ourselves this turning to God and asking God to bless us? I'm wondering if you would be

kind enough to indulge me personally for a moment.

> ...I happen to be the son of an immigrant father. I remember how he used to talk to me and tell me of his dream that possessed his youthful spirit to come to America....barely eighteen years of age, he gathered funds together from friends and relatives, packed his bags - - three-and-a-half-weeks on the steamer until he arrived at Ellis Island.....never to see his loved ones again, never to return to his native land. There was that obsession -- America as no other nation on the face of the earth beckoned him. It was America that opened her doors to him, whose Lady Liberty, with a kind of outstretched hand, said, "Come! -- wretched and poor as you may be -- come!"
>
> ...he used to tell me of his debt of gratitude to those here who gave him a chance, so that the first $200 that he earned he sent back to his family and his friends.....
>
> ....he used to walk from one village to another -- I've told you this before, haven't I? - - with a sachel in one hand, a sachel in the other, balanced together by that leather strap around his shoulder, he'd go from village to village.
>
> .....there were those who befriended him, who taught him to read, who taught him to write. And then how deeply moved he would recite for me that event-of-event when he was declared a citizen of the United States of America!

...I know what this land has meant to people like him, and to others. And that's why I can say to you without any hesitation - - "God be merciful to us - - God, bless us, that we can be like this to other people."

What a salutary exercise it could be right now if I interrupted this sermon and asked all those present within these walls to stand who are the sons of immigrants and the daughters of immigrants, by the first or second generation - - what shuffling there would be, what evidence there would be as we would stand and recognize the debt that we owe to a nation that said, "God ahead and come - - "...and then to give what we've given.

In God's plan for my life you know that I have had the good fortune to travel around the world, and then to receive one special assignment after another that's taken me into a variety of climes and cultures. With my own eyes I have seen what the outstretched hand of America has done for other people. I've seen the land that's been reclaimed. I have seen the schools that have been built. I have seen the hospitals that have been established. I have seen the hungry who have been fed who otherwise would have starved to death. I've seen the ill-clad who have been made warm by your clothing who otherwise would have frozen to death. I have seen the Christians in America who have gone to take the Gospel of hope and to give a redeeming touch to other people because they happen to live in a land that ~~xxxx~~ says, "You are welcome to go in God's name - - and we will make it easy for you to go in God's name."

This is not true of other nations.

This is not true of the second most powerful nation in the world today. And so I say to you, we have a perfect right to rise and say, "God, be merciful to us and bless us" -- because God exercises a kind of economy. If I know the mind of God at all, I know that God works in this way, "Alright, you can have it, but I give it to you, only I ask that you use it to help other people." So therefore we do have a right -- just as the Jew of old

would pray the Psalm #67 -- "Go ahead, God, bless us, that we may be a blessing to others" -- we have a right to turn prayerfully to God, and I say to you that just as you and I don't do enough praying for our own selves, that we might be made fit and humble in the sight of God, just so I suggest to you, we haven't done enough praying for our own nation. Maybe had we prayed more earnestly for America she might not find herself with all that mess in the political arena today, maybe some of our leaders could have been more than what they've turned out to be, if we had prayed for them. Let this sermon at this point be a measure of rebuke to all of us - - "God, be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause his face to shine upon us, that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." ...."Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee - - - then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us . . . "

-- to what end?

" . . . that all the ends of the earth shall fear Him . . . "

What does that mean? -- respect Him as the giver of all good things being channeled through us.

I carry around in my wallet something that was written for me by one of the three people in this world that I happen to love most. He had read it in a book. He says, "In every man's life there ought to be two great moments: the moment when he discovers that he was actually born into the world, and the second moment when he discovers why he was born, to what end." The parallel remains for this nation. America needs to discover all over again that she

was created with the smile of God upon her. Read again the charter by which we were founded, and discover all over again the eternal dimension, the divine ingredient....

> ...and then secondly, America must learn to discover all over again the purpose that she was meant to serve. Maybe we'll think about it on July 4.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

SERMON

...based on Mark 4:35-41

and delivered at the Communion
Service, evening of July 9, 1974
LCA CONVENTION IN BALTIMORE.

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
LCA Convention - Baltimore, Maryland July 9, 1974

Text: *"He said to them, Why are ye fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"*
Mark 4:40

Let us begin with the point at which every sermon should continue, and one may also add quickly, conclude: with, of all things, a text! And the text for tonight is from the second lesson that was read: the good news as put down for us by that man named Mark - - chapter four, verse 40 - - - "Why are ye fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

That's our Blessed Lord for you. At it again magnificently. Giving us, that's what He's doing, a case study in two questions: where the second of the two questions constitutes an answer to the first!

And whether you should deal with the words of the text in context -- or not -- I suggest to you they can stand alone exceptionally well. While they come to us out of a precise situation, the predicament of man as here represented is not uncommon.

Specifically, as you may recall, it's the wonderful story in the Gospel according to the earliest of recorders where Jesus comes to the rescue of panic-stricken disciples. He calmed the sea -- and them -- when a storm had overtaken them. Caught in a tight spot, they were bewildered and bereft. Much to His disappointment, they were not equal to the event. So, as He was wont to do, quietly and calmly, He took over, resolved the

difficulty before their very eyes. Having done that, He went on to make the most of the opportunity their distress brought to Him. He used it to deal with the underlying cause of their panic.

Now you are impressed, aren't you, by the way He masterfully handled it. In so subtle fashion, He moved them immediately beyond their situation - - - to what was vastly more important - - their predicament. And all of this He did superbly by asking those two questions - - - - where the second of the two implies the answer to the first. He just wasn't about to settle for anything less than a realistic appraisal of the incident. So all in one breath -- questions asked -- answer given: "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" In these words and with this technique God's Great Galilean comes to grips with a central problem common to us all: <u>our fearfulness.</u> In fact none other than that astute observer of the human scene, G. Bernard Shaw, maintained: "There is one universal passion: it is fear."

On the other hand permit me to hasten that our Blessed Lord referred <u>not so much to fear as to fearfulness.</u> There is a slight and delicate line that can be drawn. He put it wisely who said: "Fear is a biological instinct planted in our being to protect us from needless risks and to promote our efficiency. Fearfulness, however, is quite a different matter. It is fear driven to excess, gone wild and rank, out of hand and beyond control." And I myself would most certainly add: without any reliance upon the reliability of God!

Allow me now to say something quite parenthetical. Whatever a man is at ten o'clock in the morning, or say at two o'clock in the afternoon, he is moreso at eleven o'clock at night. One assumes, you see, that come the approach of midnight, most of us will have crawled into our beds. Left alone at that point in time, either fear or faith takes over!

H. G. Wells, bless his soul, reflected in this vein and lamented:

> "As night goes round the earth, always there are hundreds of thousands of people who should be sleeping, lying awake in their beds, fearing a competition, dreading lest they cannot make good, ill of some illness they cannot comprehend, distressed by some irrational quarrel, maddened by some thwarted instinct or some suppressed and thwarted desire."

So! Man is a fearful creature. Seemingly there is no end to the grouping of our fears. Victor Hugo had his own perceptive way of classifying the fears that so easily beset man. Do you remember how he handled them so expertly in his trilogy? First he thought of man's fear of Nature, and he wrote "Toilers of The Sea." Then he set himself to thinking of man's fear of society and wrote "Les Miserables." And you're right! He naturally went on to deal with man's fear of God and wrote "Notre Dame de Paris."

Personally speaking as any pastor of a decade or so of experience can do, and from the vantage point of one who has been privileged to listen in on human hearts, there is the trilogy of fears we can relate.

There is the fear of the past. Some there are who remain haunted by a day that was. It had its moment of indiscretion or its season of folly and stupidity. If only they could be free of the sordid memory that continues to sear as it cripples. And what is more, if only others could have done with it! There are folks, you see, who can never set another man free from his past. They deliberately imprison him in it. Forshame, twice shame upon them since from the Christian perspective: every sinner has a future and every saint has a past!

There are those who fear the present. The past is over. The future has not yet come. But at hand is the unavoidable present with its inescapable pressure. There is the decision that must be made today - - it can no longer be delayed - - the choice must be made now. There is the appointment that must be kept today. There is the adversary who must be faced today. It's all locked into the agenda of life which is called TODAY.

There are those who fear the future. So far so good, they say. Today isn't so bad and we did survive yesterday. But then think of all those terrible things that could happen: like filling out that medical form. One enjoys a measure of limited satisfaction in chalking off all the ailments and conditions he's escaped so far - - only to be sobered by the notion that what he has not had -- he could get! The future gives pause for reflection on so many fronts: Uncle Joe did divorce his wife after 34 years of an apparently good marriage: will Frank leave me, asks Nellie,

once the children are on their own and his niche in life is secure? The neighbor down the street had a business partner he had known from school days, yet after 25 years of continued company growth and expansion he defrauded him and left him in ruin. Could that - - what if - - that should happen to me fearfully ponders Charlie. Aunt Sally, who never had an ache or pain, one day discovered a lump on her breast. The surgeon, upon examination of other vital organs, gave her three to four months to live. He was correct - - it was 14 months to the day.

Whether we think in terms of the past, present or future; Nature, Man or God; things specific or things general, our fearfulness cripples us. Whatever else there is to say - - it is the great crippler!

[It has been maintained that FEAR is man's greatest adversary. According to an ancient legend, a man driving one day to Constantinople was stopped by an old woman who asked him for a ride. He took her up beside him and, as they drove along, he looked at her and became frightened and asked "Who are you?"

The old woman replied: "I am the dreaded cholera."

Thereupon the peasant ordered the old woman to get down and walk; but she persuaded him to take her along upon her promise that she would not kill more than five people in Constantinople. As a pledge of her promise, she handed him a dagger, saying to him that it was the only weapon with which she could be killed. Then she added: "I shall meet you in two days. If I break my promise, you may stab me."

In Constantinople 120 people died of the cholera. The enraged man who had driven her to the city, and to whom she had given the dagger as a pledge that she would not kill more than five, went out to look for the old woman, and meeting her raised his dagger to kill her. But she stopped him saying, "I have kept my agreement. I killed only five. Fear killed the others."

(The legend is a true parable of life. Where disease kills its thousands, fear kills its tens of thousands. The greatest miseries of mankind come from the dread of trouble rather than from the presence of trouble. From the cradle to the grave, fear casts its baleful shadow. Fear betrays man's spirit, breaks down his defence, disarms him in battle, unfits him for the work of life, and adds terror to the dying bed.)]

Now back to the text and its setting. You will recall that once their panic had subsided, thanks to His mastery of wind and wave, Jesus asked the obvious question -- "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Mark it well, friend. It is significantly put, for the opposite of faith is not "unfaith," but fear. And it is the perfect love of God in Christ which sets us free from fear.

Very shortly we shall receive the Sacrament. Whatever you may understand by it - - see it again as God coming to us personally and completely in Christ - - and what may also be added: come to us precisely!

Talk about the love of God that casts out fear, and you may then ask - - - how do we know God is love? Jesus, of course, who was constantly saying "Fear Not" is the answer.

Herbert Farmer puts it well in his book "God and Men": "Discerning the love of God at work at that one point in historical time, the Christian is prepared to trust it over all history, all time; discerning it at that one point in space, he is prepared to trust it -- as it were -- in all places whatsoever, and over all space; discerning it at work in that particular complex of personal relationships which constitutes the earthly life of Jesus, he is prepared to trust it to be at work in all personal relationships whatsoever."

The New Testament declares the faith that Christ is Master of The Storm. There is no greater storm than that waged by the unleashed forces of evil. To those of us caught up in the sea of sin, tossed about and beset, Christ comes now and says - - fear not, I have redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature . . . !

# # # #

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The First Sunday in Advent December 1, 1974

John 1 :18

(complete introduction not recorded)

First, Christianity is one among many religions.

Second, we have much in common with the other religions.

Now third, the declaration: Of all the religions, Christianity remains distinctive. And that distinction lies in what we are called upon to celebrate so clearly these next few weeks, that God comes to us uniquely and persuasively in the person of Jesus Christ.

Now the text for this sermon, recorded as the 18th verse of the first chapter of the Gospel according to John: "No man has seen God at any time. God's only Son who is nearest to the Father's heart, He has made Him known."

Truth is truth, of course it is, but sometimes we give it more heed when we recognize the authority of the one who speaks these words of truth. I bring it to your attention now that they were spoken by none other than that individual who I suppose was closer to Jesus Christ than any other person on this earth at the time that He lived, other than Mary and Joseph, that beloved disciple, a man named John. And when you come to the altar very shortly, why don't you take a good look at those figures carved into wood here at the altar at Saint Luke and appreciate all over again that presence of the man nearest Jesus Christ, leaning upon His shoulder. Now presumably because of insights that he had that few others had, he writes these words for us: "No man has seen God at any time. God's only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart -- He has made Him known."

Is that double-talk or isn't it? "No man has seen God at any time" - - and yet before the sentence is concluded John would have us believe that He's made known to us by Jesus Christ.

When John writes these words for us he's coming to us straight out of good

Jewish tradition and teaching, for the Jews made much of the fact that God must remain invisible. He wasn't to be a God who could be seen. You may remember how when the Children of Israel were wandering through the wilderness, heading toward the promised land, that God got them ready, laid down a series of commandments, one of which was this: "You shall not make unto thee any graven images." - - for they were to be surrounded by people, on every side, who made gods, with their own hands they created them, out of silver, out of stone, our of gold. God, the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, says: "O no you don't! You're going to be different." They went so far as never so much as, for a period in their history, to attempt to pronounce the name of God, so very removed was He from them and so high and holy regard were they to have had for Him. And frequently they make reference to Him not simply as the God Jahweh, but "I AM THAT I AM". You understand the reasoning, don't you? A god who can be made by somebody's hands isn't really much of a god. A made god really has no meaning, one that we can fashion and create, one that we can put down in front of us and stare at it. A God who is the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob says, "You don't do this" - - so straight out of such tradition John, the beloved disciple, says, "No man has seen God at any time"....but then he goes on to say, which is the heart of the matter: "The only begotten Son, He has declared Him, the Father's Son who is nearest to his heart, He has made Him known"....because down deep inside every one of us there is a desire to know what God is really like.

We want so much to be able to see God. In company with some of you I too have traveled in other parts of the world, where there are other religions, and I've come back to fully appreciate the advantage that we have, for we know something of the nature and the character of God in a way that they do not know. The distinction which is ours lied in the fact that God has made Himself known

to us in Jesus Christ. What makes the Christian religion distinctive is Jesus Christ. He's ours. And He's ours alone -- not to keep, of course not, but to share.

You've undoubtedly had an experience where you find yourself in a room, partitioned from other rooms, and in the room adjoining yours you can hear voices but you never so much as see the pace of the person who is speaking. It's far less than satisfying, for there are some of us who honestly believe that they can better understand what a person really is if they can look into their face, look into their eyes, if we can trace something of their character upon their face.

Some people feel that way about God -- if only, to use a figure of speech -- we could trace the lines of love upon His face, if only we could see Him at close range! Advent deals with the great and wonderful truth that God stoops to accommodate Himself to us. You and I are incapable of finding our way to God. What we know of God we know because He sees fit to reveal Himself, He comes to us -- that's what Advent means. There are any number of people I know, within and without the Faith, who fail to appreciate the real meaning of Advent and the meaning of the Incarnation. Press them against the wall and ask them what the Incarnation really means -- they can't fully explain it because they don't think enough about it. And they fail to allow its great truth to make its impression upon the fabric of their minds.

I happen to be one of those who sometimes tucks things under the glass plate which happens to be on top of his desk (less cluttered now than years ago)...and when I was ridding things out, there was one picture that I could not find it in my heart to remove. It's the picture of that grand and good man of the Church, Pope John XXIII. I remember in the first year of his papacy, when Christmas came around he went to a prison in Rome, and he said ever so eloquently, "You could not come to me -- therefore I have come to you" Because

we are imprisoned by our fears, because we are imprisoned by our frustrations, because we are imprisoned by our sins, by our wickedness, we are incapable of going to God. So God, out of love, comes to us. You remember that three-word definition for God from Sunday School days: "God is Love." It's the nature of love to seek the object of love. The lover is always going to his beloved. In order to do that, God who is love so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. So God, we Christians cherish the thought, makes Himself known to us through His Son.

Do you remember when He was here on earth, the disciples were up-tight as to what was the basic nature and the character of God. And they came to Jesus one time and they made it known to Him: "Tell us really what God is like! and we'll be satisfied." Quietly and calmly He stood in front of them and He said, "Take a look. I and the Father are one, is the fundamental truth. He who would see the father sees me -- he who sees me sees the Father." is a free translation.

Is it possible to behold the face of God today? Is God being made visible now? He comes to me as I read the records, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John....He comes to he as I identify with you within His Church. There are those who put the Church in this manner: The Church is the extension of Jesus Christ in the world today as it is bound together by the Holy Spirit. There are whose of you who help me read the fine lines of love upon the face of God -- today -- in this place. And because we have the understanding of the Sacrament that we do, God comes to us, as we receive His Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament. He who would discern spiritual things must ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit by which he can see these things. God makes Himself known to those who desire His appearing. And that's what Advent is all about. Get ready! He's coming! Don't miss Him! Of all the people on the face of the earth, we Christians are the fortunate ones. No man has seen God at any time, but the Son, nearest the father, has revealed Him, has made Him known to us. This I most certainly believe. And that's why I can say to you now: May the peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Amen. (transcribed as recorded)

Sermon ~ Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Advent

December 8, 1974

"THE DAY THAT'S BEFORE US"

Romans 13:12-13

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from his Son Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When I was a little lad I had strange and uncomfortable thoughts about the end of the world. For the life of me, I can't quite figure out even to this day why I felt exactly as I did. But I remember how troubled I was at the thought of the world coming to an end before I had a chance to grow up. Presumably it wasn't that I was shaken by the possibility of the cataclysm, but would you believe it, that maybe what unsettled me most was the belief that I could be shortchanged. That is, I wouldn't have a chance to live out my life to a normal conclusion, or perhaps I may not be able to make my contribution to society.

As memory serves me, I don't remember ever discussing this with my pears, or as far as that's concerned, discussing with anybody at all. Now why do I mention it to you this morning? Perhaps at any age some of us have a way of believing that time seems to be running out on us. Perchance that's the reason why a few years ago that witticism introduced by a morning radio commentator made its dent upon the fabric of our minds: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

William Barclay recalls for us how Andrew Marvell could always hear

"Time's wing-ed chariot hurrying near"

...or how John Keats was haunted by fear that he might cease to be

"before his pen had gleaned his teeming brain"

For me, he's always been a favorite -- maybe he's your favorite too, Robert

Louis Stevenson, once spoke in this same manner when he wrote these lines:

"The morning drum call on my eager
ear thrills unforgotten yet
The morning dew lies yet undried
along my fields at noon;
But now I pause at whiles in what
I do,
And count the bell, and tremble,
lest I hear, my work untrimmed,
The sunset gun too soon."

Or on the other hand, could it be that some of us live out the days of our years troubled by what we might refer to as the "unexpected crisis moment."

Now all of this leads me to introduct to you at this time the text for today's sermon. It happens to be one of my favorite passages in the entire New Testament. We used to read it on the first Sunday in Advent when we followed the old cycle of Lessons. And even though we've introduced a new cycle this year, repeatedly in the course of the past week I have read it. It's from the Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to certain Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome. It happens to be the 11th and 12th verses of his 13th chapter: "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to wake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light."

It seems to me as I continue to study this text that it says two things to us. One, the shortness of time. Second, the threat of time.

Now for the most part when we think of time, we think of the fact that it's running out on us. None of us knows but what tomorrow could be our last.

We never quite know how much time if left for any of us. But I'm not so sure that that's the important thing. It seems to be this morning that what we need to recognize is the fact that if we don't watch out, whatever time we have before us could threaten. And as it threatened us, crippled us, and fail to draw out the best that we have to offer.

David Watson wrote a book, I think this past year, that bears the title: "In Search of God." He reflects upon the mood of our day, which is some, according to him, of despair and frustration. He goes on to say that most of our leading experts are extremely pessimistic. He includes in his book a consideration of a work that was done by the computer scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Professor J. Forrester. Do you know what he did? He did the kind of thing that perhaps would have appealed to you if you were daring enough to do it - - he gathered together data that he felt significant of our day and relevant to our situation and fed it into the computer so that the computer might predict for us what lies ahead. How he did it I don't know. But he gathered together all the related data dealing with the population picture today - - the population explosion in other parts of the world, the zero growth population here in our part of the world. Then as he gathered all of that together he put that in the computer.....

> ...then he moved over into the field of pollution: the problem that we have on our hands regarding the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. He put all of that data under the title POLLUTION, 1974 -- fed that to the computer....
>
> ...then he moved over into the world of finance - interlocking directorates, deficit financing, inflation - - put all of that into the computer....
>
> ...then he concerned himself with technology -- what it's been able to accomplish and what he believed technology was doing to us.....he fed that into the computer...

...then he concerned himself with our natural resources -- how we use them, recklessly and otherwise, our search for new sources...the distribution of these natural resources, the way we're able to lay hold upon them, the way they're manipulated, controlled, by a handful of people, as the case may be.....he fed that into the computer.

...then he dealt with what he referred to as the quality of our life -- the kind of human beings we are today, presumably dealing with our moral and emotional, our fears and our frustrations.....

....then last of all he dealt with food production.

What do you suppose is the computer's answer? Out came the prediction that civilization has perhaps only one generation to survive.

In many informed circles there is an atmosphere of total frustration. The conclusion in many quarters is that man has no answers. Prophets of doom today are today's scientists.

Now let me ask you to think about something that we don't often recognize. We've thought about it once or twice and we've shoved it into the background. But it ought to haunt us, because it did happen in our day, the day for many of us. The atomic bomb in Hiroshima killed 87,000 people in one second. According to the facts and figures which are at hand and I am about to share with you, the hydrogen bomb, tested seven years later, was a thousand times stronger. The bomb to which we referred to in 1945 killed 87,000 people in one second....seven years later, we had on our hands a bomb that was a thousand times stronger. Only two years after that, Americans tested the cobalt bomb, and what did they prove? We proved that the destruction of all life on earth is possible. The explosion of a cobalt bomb would cause a radioactive cloud whose degree of destruction would be 300,000 times stronger than the first hydrogen bomb....which in turn was a thousand times stronger than the first atomic bomb. It's been said that mankind now has sufficient nuclear explosives in the world to eliminate itself 50,000

times over.

If you don't mind, the facts about pollution are equally alarming. I can only give it to you as I read it: the average American has twelve parts per million DDT in his fatty tissues. Now maybe that doesn't mean anything to you until I tell you that with only seven parts in meat, such meat is considered unfit to eat. Many scientists today declare that all life is imperiled by DDT pollution alone.

But I suppose we are not the first to look upon ourselves as living under a cloud. We are not the first to say that we live in dark and difficult times. Presumably every generation feels that way. Bless Viola Lovre's soul, she told me some time ago that she went back over those family Christmas letters that she's been wont to write for twenty years -- the kind of thing that you do, you know, you sit down, you reflect, you share news about your family, where you happen to live, the situation in which you find yourself against the background of the present day.....she went back over her letters and discovered that she was beginning every one of those for twenty years in the same way: "We live in dark and difficult times."

The early Christians felt that way. It was exactly in that kind of a world that Jesus Christ was born. It was in that kind of a world in which the Christian Church was developed. But mark you, when the Apostle Paul sits down and writes a letter to Christians in Rome, he does not say -- and this is very, very important - - he does not say: "The day is far spent, the night is at hand".... as though it's time for the curtain to fall. He was Christian to the core, and that is why he wrote, and notice the choice of nouns and where they appear: said he - - "The night is far spent (not "the day") - - "The night is far spent - - it's the day that's at hand." For Christians were meant to face life, come wind or weather, full-fisted -- head-on -- to seize the moment and to live it to the full.

There's an illustration that I'm inclined to use from time to time. In case

YOU'VE FORGOTTEN it, I'm going to remind you of it now. Some years back when there was a terrible volcanic eruption in Italy, there was ruin everywhere. And the only element of hope that appeared on the horizon was a fully-cassocked Roman priest, tall and gaunt, walking amidst the people suffering despair, with a baby in his arms. When you think of a baby you always think of tomorrow.

When God's love was so demonstrated to us, He came in the form of a Babe. Christians are meant to have their faces toward the dawn, not the setting of the sun. "The night is far spent" - but it's the day that's at hand, and God willing, maybe when we come back next Lord's Day I'll be able to take it from that point. But in the meantime let me read for you quickly what left its dent upon the fabric of my heart when as a student in seminary and the outbreak of World War II, I read the work of the Jewish poet, Stefan Zweig. In German he wrote his very remarkable play called "Jeremias." With marvelous insight and creative power he dramatizes the life of the greatest of the prophets, and the last tragic days of Jerusalem. At length the city is taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and the long line of captives moves off from the loved hill of Zion to the far, far land of exile. And as they march they sing, and what a song:

"We tread the holy path of our sorrows,
From anguish to anguish, by pain to be purified,
We the warred upon, we the conquered,
Ever made prisoners, ever made free,
Ever destroyed and ever renewed,
We of all peoples the jest and the shuttlecock,
We the one homeless nation of the earth,
March down the centuries,
All that are left of us,
A band without number,
Homewards to God - -
God the beginning and God the ending - -
Till He Himself be our city, our Home,
Who, as we, without rest with the stars and the years
Travels the Universe, circling in light.
Forth we go, 'forth to the future unseen,'
A people ruined; a spirit - - immortal."

And then Zweig makes the Chaldeans comment in amazement. A soldier says:

"Look! Look! They march into the sunlight! There is a glory on this people, a dawn upon their faces! Mighty must be their god!' A captain rebukes him: "Their god! Have we not broken down his altars? Have we not conquered Him?" But the soldier replies: "It is impossible to conquer the invisible. You can kill men, but not the God who lives in them. You can compel a people, but its spirit - never!" The trumpets sound for the third time. The sun is now risen over Jerusalem and shines upon the ranks of a nation marching from Zion, forth into the centuries.

* * * *

(Transcribed as recorded)